

UNCLE JOHN
VASSAR

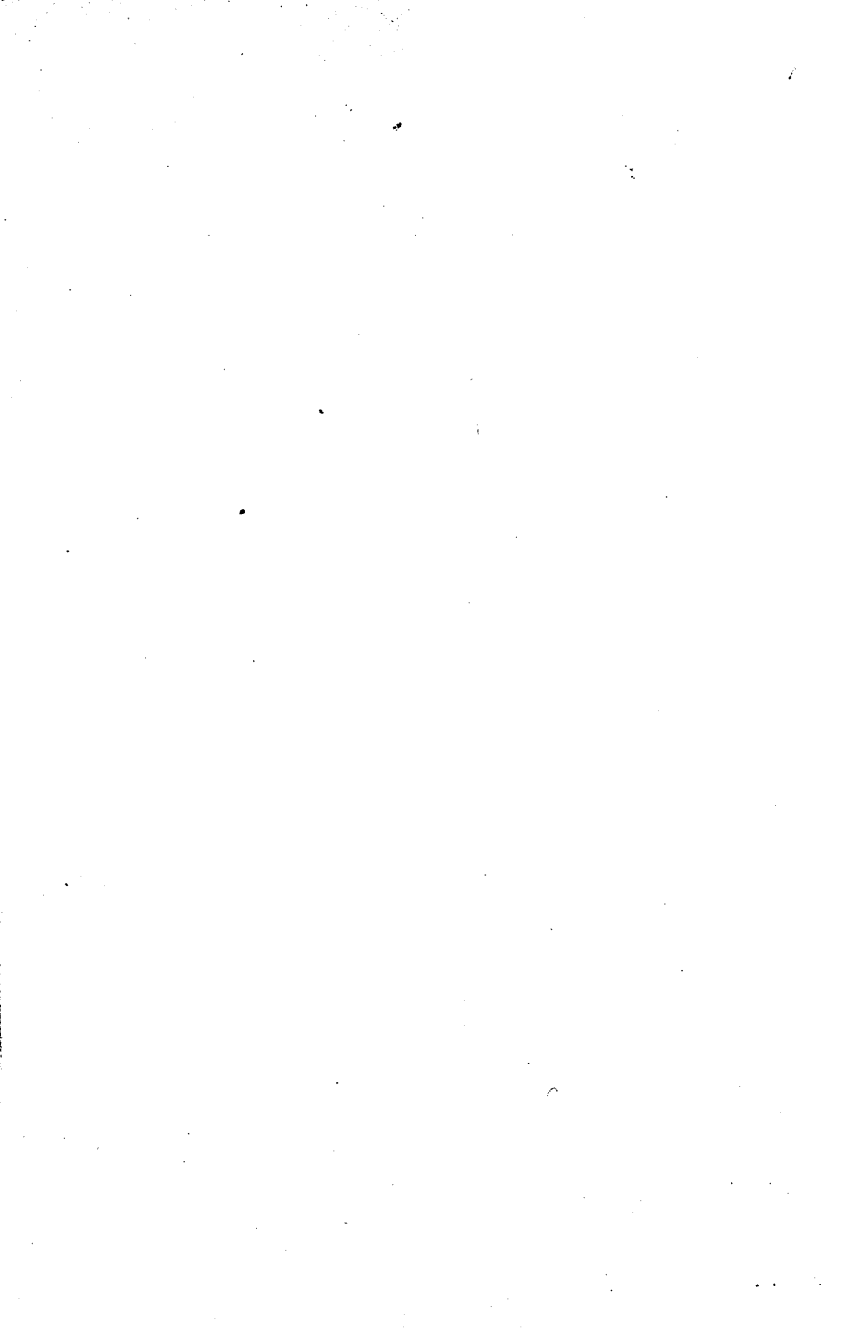
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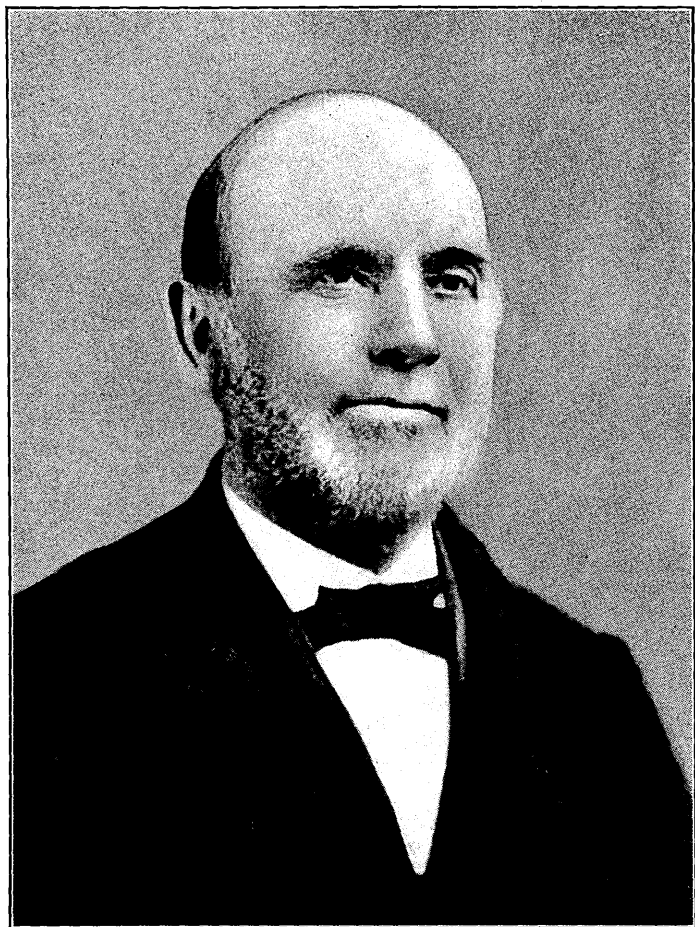
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Yours in Jesus
John E. Vassar

UNCLE JOHN VASSAR OR THE FIGHT OF FAITH

BY
THOMAS E. VASSAR, D.D.

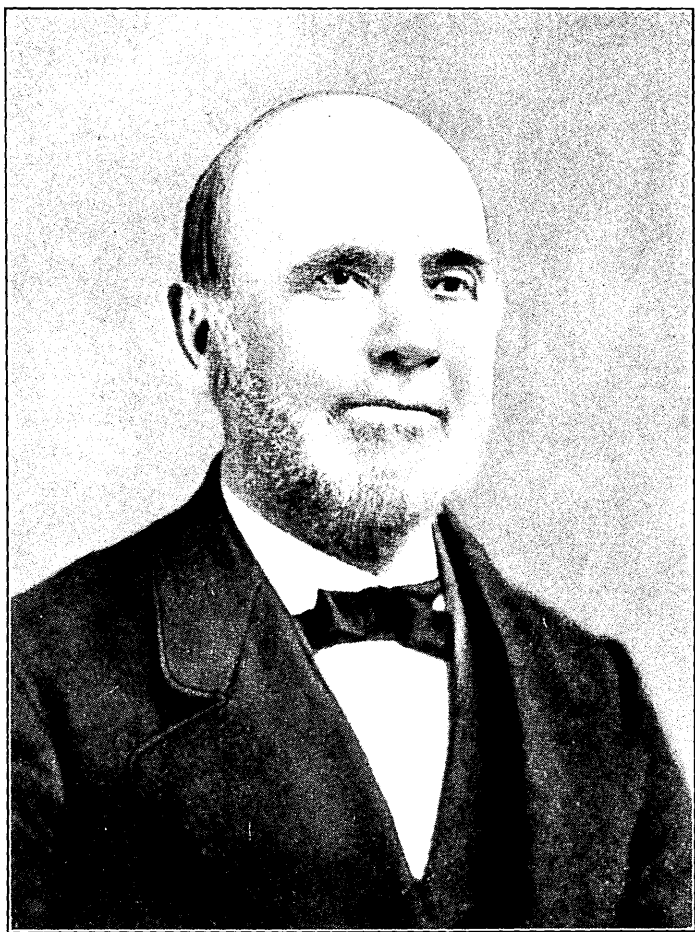
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Yours in Jesus
John E. Vassar

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FOREWORD

"UNCLE JOHN VASSAR or The Fight of Faith" has been revised and republished under the strong conviction that it has a definite message and mission for the Church of to-day.

The revision has consisted largely in the elimination of duplications and extraneous matter and also of certain references to political animosities now happily forgotten. Some additions have been made to clarify the text and to better visualize this wonderful man of God. The revisers consider it extremely fortunate that Dr. Charles Gallaudet Trumbull, editor of the *Sunday School Times*, has consented to prepare a new Introduction.

Means and methods of presenting the Gospel Message change but the evangelistic passion, the irresistible urge of the Spirit-filled life to make known the unsearchable riches of Christ to a suffering and sinning world, is much the same now as in the apostolic age. Judging from the past a revival of sane, personal evangelism would greatly strengthen the Christian faith when so many hostile forces are striving to undermine and overthrow it.

The spirit of mass production and mass movements has well-nigh obscured the personal element in both material enterprise and religious effort. The Church, caught on the crest of this wave, has endeavored to adjust her methods to meet the popular cry and has almost let

slip Christ's own vital program of personal evangelism. If there be one thing above another the Church needs in this crucial hour it is a renewed consciousness of personal responsibility. The greatest revival that could come to this world of ours would be a renewed emphasis of personal evangelism. That pattern prayer—thy Kingdom come, thy will be done—would long since have found its answer on earth had we clung more tenaciously to the simple yet vital program of our Lord, Personal Evangelism.

Had the story of the woman at the well been more often reproduced in our modern days; had that spirit which made it meet for him to go through Samaria more fully possessed the Christian Church, a different story would now be current and the blatant and scornful challenge of infidelity would have long since died away.

It is this burden of heart that motivates the revision of the inspiring story of Uncle John Vassar. His life was an energetic personification of the words of Jesus, "He that saveth his life shall lose it; but he that spendeth his life shall save it." None ever labored more tirelessly and constantly yet none ever realized more from their Christian life. His life was but added vindication that witnessing for the Master is the supreme Christian task that brings rewards and compensations far beyond the weight of gold or thrill of human laudation.

INTRODUCTION

THE reading of this book will be an unexpected experience. We may feel as a prominent pastor and army chaplain did when he first met Uncle John Vassar; he was repelled at first by what seemed like cant and extravagant religious language, but very soon he realized that here was a man different from any he had ever met before. At Uncle John's funeral this pastor said: "I cannot altogether describe the impression he made. I know that when he left I followed him out and yielded to the impulse that was strongly upon me to tell him I feared I knew but very little of what it was to be spiritually blessed, and to ask him to pray for me. His riches convicted me of poverty. And I have heard a good many say that meeting him produced a like effect on them."

That is what the reading of Uncle John Vassar's life story is likely to do for us. Its reading has been such an overwhelming experience for me that I shrink indeed from attempting to write anything in the nature of an Introduction to the new edition of this amazing book; but I can tell a little, a very little, of the effect it has had upon myself and upon others to whom I have read parts of the story. A day or two before writing this I was in a small group of earnest, devoted Christian people who meet to-

gether from time to time to confer and pray about important Christian work, for which they are responsible. After reading aloud, here and there, for half an hour or so, I asked them what they thought of the book—how it made them feel. One mature Christian layman, who has given unsparingly of his time and strength and money for many years in the Lord's service and who has given himself unreservedly to the Lord, said promptly: "It made me feel like dirt." It was a blunt expression, but every one in the group knew exactly what he meant, for all felt the same way. Humble, penitent, pleading prayers were offered that day because of the way Uncle John's life, fifty years after he had gone to be with the Lord, had cut deep into our lives.

Is it really possible for any man or woman to "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord"? Paul did it; can it really be done to-day, and can this attitude of utter abandonment to the Lord and His testimony be continued and maintained, day after day, year after year, without break or let down, so that the life is fairly consumed by its passion for the Lord Jesus and by His passion for lost souls? We may have had honest doubts as to the practical possibility of living such a life, but our doubts will be gone after reading this simple narrative. Here is the life of a man who was employed in a brewery and was not saved until he was twenty-eight years old. Then he was born again, and he "obtained an assurance of sonship so bright and clear that nothing afterward darkened it for an hour." For the next

thirty-seven years, until he was taken Home, this man lived for but a single end, glory of God and the salvation of souls. Of the question just asked, the late Dr. A. J. Gordon, whose Introduction to the first edition of the book is a classic in Christian literature, says: "It is good to find in this skeptical age one life that can answer that question without any qualification. This man knew nothing else, thought of nothing else, asked for nothing else, but this one thing." Dr. Gordon himself, as is well known, was one of the most consecrated men of God in the past generation, whom to meet and hear was the experience of a lifetime; yet Dr. Gordon says of Uncle John that he was "the most powerful illustration which I have ever witnessed of utter and unreserved consecration to God. . . . He seemed to have become absolutely naturalized as a citizen of heaven, and to be living in the world for the sole object of getting men out of it, and introducing them into the kingdom of God . . . I can truly say that I never received such quickening and inspiration from any living person." Do not pass by Dr. Gordon's Introduction. It is as remarkable as the book itself, and its study of a Spirit-filled character and utterly unusual methods of personal soul-winning is unforgettable.

May I say in passing that I am grateful to remember that I was "brought up" on Uncle John Vassar. I do not recall that I ever met him, but my father, the late H. Clay Trumbull, knew and loved him, and was continually talking about his remarkable power and experiences in soul-winning. I doubt not that Uncle John had much to do with H. Clay Trumbull's devotion to personal work and

the experiences set forth in his little book "Individual Work for Individuals." I know how he would rejoice, as I do, that a new edition of the Vassar story is to be circulated far and wide, for surely the Church of Christ needs this challenge and call in these days of defeated lives and lost souls and sin and Satan unleashed.

One will be struck with the exceptional beauty and power in the character of writing to be found throughout this book, both in Dr. Gordon's Introduction and in the narrative and tributes. The literary beauty of the whole story is exceptional. It would seem as though all who knew Uncle John Vassar were fairly set on fire as they began to think about him and write about him: that when Uncle John was the subject, they could not help writing actual literature. The heavenly beauty of this rare character seems to lift the verbal vehicles of expression to a higher plane. Notice, for example, such sentences as these:

He gave one literally a powerful electric shock the moment he touched him. There was such intensity of zeal, accompanied with such a magnetic manner, that the impression was instantaneous and quite overwhelming. It was the lightning-like penetration of a piety that was always charged to the highest pitch.

The person addressed was always stunned and startled, sometimes made angry; but in multitudes of cases wounded into life.

It becomes us as alert soldiers to strike for the citadel of the heart at once, instead of giving him time to

fortify, while we are engaged in the light skirmishing and counter-marching of general conversation.

He believed it as wrong to hoard grace as gold. Communion with Christ was only a holy portal through which to pass to the help of man.

He did not belong to that clique of religious perambulators who are more useful anywhere else than in their own homes.

Drowsy Christians started up where he came, as sleeping soldiers at bugle call

With melted hearts and streaming eyes by way of Calvary we drew near our Lord. Uncle John seemed to me that night like a guide who knew every inch of the road and took us right into the secret place of the Most High.

Commenting on the fear most of us have lest we "violate the proprieties," and Uncle John's lack of foolish timidity, the biographer says: "The question may well be asked, and seriously pondered, whether we are not in danger, by our over-nice notions concerning means and methods, of letting men perish whom we have been commanded to pull out of the fire."

The prevalent piety . . . is decent, moderate, quiet. . . . It is not that men openly reject and make war upon it [our holy religion] but that they drowsily sleep around its altars.

The great want of the church is godly men: men girded with awful zeal; . . . men who will thrust in the unwilling face of darkness all the light of God, and

whom no disappointments can palsy, no opposition embitter, and no misgivings keep back.

Let it not be supposed that Uncle John Vassar's consecration, and supernatural enduement, and holy boldness always carried everything before him. He had some bitter enemies, and experiences of discouragement that would have broken most men's spirit. Early in his Christian service he says: "I expected difficulties, and am not disappointed in the least." But it is thrilling to read of the ways in which God repeatedly made the wrath of man to praise Him, and made Satan sorry that he had ever led in these attacks. One will not soon forget the story, for example, of what happened after a young woman, a brilliant social leader, whom Uncle John had sought to lead to Christ, bitterly resented this and circulated the lying report that he had offered her an insult; the slander closed doors in his face, and he actually had to leave the community and go elsewhere in his work. But he is praising God for that experience to-day, and so is that young woman and many others of whom she was the leader.

As a study in effective methods of personal soul-winning this volume is unique. Uncle John may seem to have been a law unto himself, but he had hold of eternal principles and methods which, one is convinced, God will honor everywhere. While he was unconventional, direct, unexpected and blunt in his approach and pursuits, at the same time he was a man of courtesy and delicacy of feeling, deep sensitiveness, tact, and a rightful observance of real etiquette as the true Christian always should be. His

transparent sincerity and love broke down opposition that might have been expected. Friends who sometimes feared for the consequences of his urgency came to smile at their fears and to thank God that Uncle John knew better than they. The wealthy and the cultured and those high in office loved the man as did the common people. Henry F. Durant, founder of Wellesley College, after having Uncle John in his beautiful home for a week, said: "I consider myself more honored to entertain this man of God than to have a king for my guest." And how many of us would dare to hold the hand of a President of the United States, when being introduced to him, until we had spoken of the Lord Jesus and asked this ruler the question of questions? With dignity and respect Uncle John Vassar did just this. And why not? Those who are in the service of the King of kings may well bear His message to kings and all rulers.

Every part of this book is extraordinary, and of priceless value to the Christian who would be used in the Lord's service. But perhaps the most valuable for our own equipment is the chapter on "Weapons in the Fight," in which the author, Uncle John's nephew, seeks out and shares with us the weapons that this victorious fighter used and the qualifications that made him what he was. We can all use these weapons; we can all let God give us the most of what this warrior had. There was no short cut to this usefulness for Uncle John; there never has been or can be, from Paul's day to ours. Uncle John Vassar paid the price; it was taxing and costly; his discipline and training lasted throughout his life. He was steeped in the word of God so that he knew, from long study and long prac-

tice, how to use the Sword of the Spirit. With this went "his habitual and almost unbroken intercourse with God in prayer." Uncle John wore "the whole armour of God"; he wrestled victoriously "against the rulers of the darkness of this world"; having done all, he stood; and multitudes are praising the Lord in His presence to-day that Uncle John's feet were "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."

CHARLES G. TRUMBULL

INTRODUCTION

WE are quite accustomed to think of religious heroes like other heroes, as belonging almost exclusively to a past age. We read with admiration of the lives and labors of such men of God as Rutherford, and Baxter, and Flavel, and McCheyne, and Brainerd, and Henry Martyn, and Judson, and we say mentally at least, "Ah yes, but we have no such workers for God in our age." Doubtless we have but few of them, for they are confessedly rare in any period. But it is our conviction, deepened and confirmed by several years of intimate acquaintance, that the servant of God whom this volume commemorates was not a whit behind any one of these great soul-winners whom we have named, either in ardent zeal, or singleness of consecration, or exalted piety. I should not make this statement were I not sure that there are scores of the most thoughtful Christians, both among the ministers and the laymen of our churches, who will be ready at once to endorse it.

To one who never met him it would be quite impossible to describe the impression which he instantly made on meeting him. He gave one literally a powerful electric shock the moment he touched him. There was such intensity of zeal, accompanied with such a magnetic manner, that the impression was instantaneous and quite overwhelming. It was the lightning-like penetration of a piety that was always charged to the highest pitch. Indeed, it

was the first question that occurred to one, how it could be possible for a man to live in such a tense and highly-wrought condition of religious fervor. Yet there was very little apparent variation of temperature. He travelled from Maine to Florida, from the Atlantic coast to the Pacific, on foot, on horseback, by rail, and by steamer, resting not in summer or in winter, in the one intense, eager pursuit of lost souls; and wherever you found him there was the same burning zeal speaking out in his looks and in his words. He was always moving in his work at a pace much nearer to a run than to a walk. In his humility he named himself "The Shepherd's Dog," and I often thought when I saw him, of the aptness of the name in another sense than that which he intended. For he was not only wonderfully successful in bringing home lost sheep to the good Shepherd, but he followed them with the keen scent and the swift pace of the hound upon the track of his game, tiring not, resting not, till he had won the object of his pursuit.

It may be permitted, in this introduction, penned by one who was privileged to know this good man intimately and to see much of his work, to point out the most striking traits of his religious character, to indicate his methods of working, and to draw therefrom such lessons as may be useful to Christian workers.

In the first place I recall with deepest interest his singular consecration and prayerfulness. Is it possible for one to live for a single end—the glory of God in the salvation of souls, and to pursue that end with all the ardor and enthusiasm with which the merchant pursues a fortune or

the politician an office? It is good to find in this skeptical age one life that can answer that question without any qualification. This man knew nothing else, thought of nothing else, asked for nothing else, but this one thing. When he came occasionally to work among my flock, he at once took the whole church and people on his heart, and began to travail for them in prayer, as though his very life depended on the issue. This intercession continued "night and day with tears" as long as he was with us. He never said indeed that he had prayed all night. But I could hear him again and again breaking forth in the darkness "with strong crying" unto God, and I knew what the burden was. It was this congregation, strangers to him till to-day. It was this flock, not one of whom had he ever seen till now. So Christlike was the love of this man, whose field was the world, that each lost soul was just as dear to him as every other. With a soul knit into unbroken fellowship with Christ, he had become "baptized into a sense of all conditions." He did not love men with the natural heart any longer. He could say with Paul, "God is my witness, how greatly I long after you all in the heart of Jesus Christ." This habitual prayerfulness was something so wonderful that I wish to emphasize it as furnishing the true secret of his life. A lady at whose house he spent a night told me that in the morning her Roman-catholic servant-girl came down, and with an astonished expression said, "Mrs. B——, that old man was praying all night; I could not sleep it made me feel so. But I should never be afraid with such a man in the house." It was impossible that he should not pray thus. It was

with him as with the devoted John Welch, of whom Fleming says that he used to make his nights such Gethsemane seasons that his family had often to remonstrate with him for losing his sleep; when he would reply, "Ah, but I have the souls of three thousand to answer for, and I know not how it is with many of them." And all through the day the intercession went on. If he met with rebuffs or discouragements, he would gird up the loins of his mind with a silent prayer, and then press on undaunted. If he had a moment to spare while waiting for dinner, he would snatch refreshment from his Bible, and then drop upon his knees for a few words with the great Life and Lover of his soul. And such was the unbroken tenor of his life for years.

Another most impressive and instructive trait of his character was his intense absorption in his labor, so that it was a real and abounding joy for him to do it. It is the truest test of one's devotion to his work, whether he is reluctant to lay it down when the hour comes for dining or sleeping. A most striking illustration of the Master's consuming zeal in laboring for the lost appears in his indifference to the claims of hunger and fatigue, as, "wearied with his journey," he sat on Jacob's well talking with the woman of Samaria. To him bodily hunger was not to be thought of, if he could satisfy his hunger for a soul's salvation. To him, the parching thirst begotten by a tropic noonday sun was nothing, if he could give to a famishing sinner to drink of the water of life, that she might never thirst. "Master, eat," was the urgent invitation of the disciples. "I have meat to eat that ye know not of," was

his reply. And to their incredulous question, "Hath any man brought him aught to eat?" he replied, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." That is a consecration to which very few probably attain, to be so utterly absorbed in holy work that the bread of service shall be sweeter than the bread of the table, and the meat of doing the Master's will shall be better than the meat of bodily food.

The good man of whom we are speaking so loved the service of his Master that it was often quite impossible to draw him away from it when the hour for dining came. He would constantly forget the claims of bodily hunger when engaged with an inquiring soul. He had often to be forced away from his work, by those who cared more for his physical needs than he himself could be made to care. Flavel tells how, in one of his rare seasons of communion with God, he became so absorbed in heavenly contemplation that he was lost to the flight of time, to hunger and to all outward things. It was literally so with this great worker's absorption in his toil. He forgot the flight of time; he heard not the call to rest and refreshment; he heeded not the gnawings of hunger. Indeed, he seemed at times entirely insensible to every earthly thing, in his overmastering and consuming desire to get the souls saved for which he was laboring.

We do not say that such indifference to the claims of the body is to be commended to the imitation of all Christian workers. Undoubtedly we can serve Christ more efficiently, as a rule, to be punctiliously careful in attending to all the conditions of physical health and comfort. But

it is inspiring to witness such an example of supreme devotion to the Master's business amid so many sad illustrations of working by measure, and timing service for Christ by the clock and the dinner-bell. There is a quaint passage on this point in Adam Bede, which we have never forgotten. "I can't abide," says the speaker, "to see men throw away their tools i' that way, the minute the clock begins to strike, as if they took no pleasure i' their work, and were afraid of doing a stroke too much. I hate to see a man's arm drop down as if he was shot, before the clock's fairly struck, just as if he'd never a bit o' pride and delight in 's work. The very grindstone ull go on turning a bit after you loose it."

And is there not a serious thought here to be taken to heart? How many servants of God stop their work, however pressing it may be, when noontime comes! How many ministers rush from their pulpits like relieved prisoners of toil the moment the first day of "vacation" arrives! And how many, on the other hand, are so in the toil of whole-hearted, self-forgetful consecration, that they are borne on past the time of dinner, past the time of sleeping, past the allotted hour of recreation, when the interests of souls are at stake? Undoubtedly a great attainment lies yet before us—that of finding it really our meat to do the Master's will, as it was his meat to do the Father's will; to feed so truly on the "hidden manna" that we can, if need be, put off, for a while, the claims of bodily hunger, to satisfy the more pressing claims of hunger and thirst after righteousness in those to whom the Lord has sent us with the "bread of life."

It was I think in the work of personal conversation with the unconverted that Mr. Vassar did his greatest work, and exhibited the most remarkable power. The intensity and boldness of his appeals, the tenderness and pathos of his entreaty, the tireless patience of his struggle for conquest was something which I never saw approached, and which I now remember with the greatest admiration. That old Puritan phrase, "Closing in with the sinner," expresses what he invariably did when he approached the unconverted. He grappled with the soul like a spiritual athlete. His whole bearing was that of one who knew himself to be wrestling, "not with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers." He had every weapon at instant command, and used each in turn as with the sharpest insight he saw what was needed. It was now the "terror of the Lord" and now "the love of Christ," now the freedom of salvation, now the certainty of "the wrath to come," all brought to bear with such tearful tenderness that the effect was often perfectly overwhelming. And I do not exaggerate, when I say that his subjects generally had either to surrender or to flee, such was the vehemency of his approaches. What always struck me as most remarkable in his personal conversations was their absolute abruptness. In scores of interviews of the sort which I have witnessed, I never once remember his introducing his subject with any preliminary remarks. He came at once to the theme. His first question, after the ordinary salutation, was generally the vital question, "My friend, will you kindly permit me to ask, have you been born again?"

This method I think he adopted deliberately, as having

been proved by years of experience the wisest. Noticing the shock and revulsion which this abrupt approach sometimes produced, I used to regret that he was not more circuitous in his advances. But I confess that with larger experience I have changed my mind and come to the conclusion that this directness is one of the most vital conditions of success in personal conversation. It does not require long experience to teach one the danger of starting a train of general conversation when dealing with the unconverted. For such a current once started the tide may easily become so strong that it will be found exceedingly difficult to divert it into the desired channel. Indeed, if the person addressed desires to avoid the subject, he will often do his best to prevent this result, by keeping up a strain of rapid and distracting talk and even leading on if possible into light and trivial discussion, to turn aside from which into the subject of personal salvation will be far more abrupt and difficult than it would have been to strike the subject at the outset.

We must remember that this personal dealing with men is often a duel of wills. And in this duel the strongest and most athletic will will be likely to conquer, other things being equal. Hence it is a fair question with the spiritual gladiator, how to get the advantage of his antagonist. He should adopt the best possible strategy, and aim to effect by his alertness and skill what he might fail to accomplish by main force. Hence John Vassar's method was to strike a man at once with the most direct and vital question which could be brought to bear. Instead of hinting by a lengthened introduction what he proposed to do,

he did it before his subject had time to gather himself up or brace himself against the attack. And no sooner was the battle opened than it was followed up with the intensest rapidity, by appeal, and argument, and warning, and entreaty, all ending in a most fervent and melting plea at the throne of grace that the Spirit would seal his words to him who had heard them.

The results were various, of course. The person addressed was always stunned and startled, sometimes made angry; but in multitudes of cases wounded into life. There was never the slightest tinge of severity, mark you, in the abruptness. If there was a tremendous grappling with the soul, it was a battle in which tears and entreaties were the prevailing weapons; and no rebuffs or abuse could ever draw from him a single impatient utterance. It was not his harshness but his intense earnestness that so roused men. Indeed you can well imagine what would be the result for a man of this sort to go through some street in proud, cultivated, aristocratic Boston, ringing every doorbell and confronting every household with this great question of the new birth. And this is what he did repeatedly when he labored with me. I generally heard from his visits, and sometimes in anything but complimentary terms. But he left an impression which could not be shaken off, and from which fruit, in some cases, was gathered years after. In a very appreciative notice of him by a well-known minister he speaks of the habit of going from house to house with his inevitable question, and says, "I have known him to set a whole town in an uproar by this spiritual census-taking. But when his sub-soil ploughshare had

turned a community upside down, then was the time for fruitful work." And that is true. The very offence which he so frequently gave, was often the open door into hearts hitherto hopelessly closed.

I must refer again to the method of direct and immediate approach in dealing with souls, in order to emphasize its importance. I believe it to be the first and almost the highest condition of success in the work. When a timid and self-distrustful Christian engages with a resolute, bold, self-poised unbeliever, there is, humanly speaking, an immense disparity between them. The Christian standing on the word of God, and resting in the might of the Spirit, has a vantage ground of course, which no natural qualities can give a man. But nevertheless there comes a grapple between mind and mind, between will and will, between purpose and purpose. The danger is not that the unbeliever will conquer the believer and bring him to his views. But there is danger that he will defeat him in his present purpose, that he will so swing him into the current of his stronger will, that he will so deflect him from his aim by the force of his stronger determination, as to thwart his efforts to deal with him regarding his soul. If we hold two globules of water on the finger, and then let them touch, one will drink up the other; and it is generally the larger that absorbs the smaller. If two minds come in contact, one will in like manner often completely appropriate and hold in its embrace the other. But here, while as a rule the stronger will win, it is certainly possible for the weaker to win—for the timid to sway the bold, for the humble to master the proud. And therefore the secret of

victory lies, I believe, in this one thing more than in any other: celerity, a rapid deploying of the mental forces and a brisk and determined advance before the stronger has had time to marshal his resources. This was the invariable method of our friend of whom I am speaking. This is the striking characteristic of Mr. Moody's conversations with the unconverted. It is all in the art of "stealing a march" on the sinner, to use a colloquial phrase. In Mr. Vassar's case I should use a still stronger phrase, only in a tropical sense. His habit was to stun a man at the first blow, and reason with him afterward.

Of course, in using these expressions it is not implied that the unconverted man is an enemy whom we are to dragoon into the kingdom of heaven. Only as a matter of fact he will often resist our approaches and do his best to thwart our efforts at personal dealing with him. And it becomes us as alert soldiers to strike for the citadel of the heart at once, instead of giving him time to fortify, while we are engaged in the light skirmishing and counter-marching of general conversation.

While we are on this subject of personal conversation with the unconverted, I wish to refer to another point on which Mr. Vassar exhibited peculiar genius, *viz.*, his skill in dropping a brief pungent word into the mind when there was no opportunity for an extended conversation. Jeremy Taylor, in his treatise on Holy Living, has much to say upon the value of "ejaculatory prayer"—the brief pointed petitions interjected between the ordinary and more lengthened seasons of devotion. This good man taught me, as I never learned it before, the value of ejaculatory

admonition. He was always finding opportunity to interject some pungent text of Scripture, or some startling warning or suggestion into the mind of those whom he chanced to meet casually. And I learned in some instances of great good following these brief words. I recall a simple illustration of this habit. When riding into the country with him to attend a service, a traveller stopped us on a lonely road to inquire his direction, adding that being a stranger in the neighborhood he had lost his way. "How sad it would be," interposed Mr. Vassar, addressing him with great solemnity, "if you should lose your way to heaven. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." I could see at a glance that the words made an impression, and that the loneliness of the traveller and his anxiety to find his way were just the circumstances to enforce most powerfully this wayside message. Perhaps this may seem a small matter for the consideration of the Christian worker. But I am persuaded that in his case it was a very great matter when reckoned in the sum total of his success. We heard a bank cashier describe recently the habits of a millionaire who had just died. "One secret of his success in acquiring his fortune," he said, "was his economy in little sums. He never wasted a sheet of paper, or a postage stamp. He never threw in an odd cent in making change. Every loose fragment however small was gathered up." Well, the children of the world ought not to be wiser in their generation than the children of light. Admonished as we are to "redeem the time," "to be instant

in season, out of season," we can not overestimate the importance of economizing stray opportunities. And while volumes have been written on the art of making sermons, let me enforce this lesson on making sermonettes, on thrusting in the gospel brieflet where the occasion will not allow of the lengthened discourse. It is, we venture to say, the hardest chapter in Homiletics to learn. Preachers spend so much time in getting inured to Saul's armor with its close-fitting joints of logic, with its burnished ornaments of rhetoric and illustration, that if they do not come to disdain David's sling they have little time to practise with it. But the man of God that will be thoroughly furnished, must learn the value of the humble sling of ejaculatory warning, and the smooth stone of Scripture quotation. And if we imagine that these are only inferior weapons fitted for reaching the heart of the simple-minded and ignorant, let us remember that there is nothing mightier in all God's armory than a text of Scripture, and that one of these may like David's pebble hit the head, when we only expected it to strike no higher than the heart.

The life of which I am speaking made a profound impression in another direction, *viz.*, by the startling contrast which it presented to the ordinary life of the world, and hardly less to the ordinary quality of piety in the church. I pass in saying this from the power and use of Christian conversation to that of Christian example. A humble man who never spoke of himself, except in terms of depreciation, and to whom any suggestion of credit or praise always seemed painful, he at the same time gave the most powerful illustration which I have ever witnessed of utter

and unreserved consecration to God. I am sure I do not exaggerate when I say that there was nothing in this world, from riches to bodily comfort, from reputation to personal gratification, that had the slightest attraction for him. Instead of being perplexed to acquire money as so many Christians are, he seemed greatly perplexed if any came into his hand to know what to do with it. If a ten-dollar gold piece were slipped into his pocket—as was often done by some grateful convert—he would act like a citizen of heaven wondering “whose image and superscription” this could be, and what possible value this coin could have for him “a stranger and a pilgrim in the earth.” If I were to describe his peculiarities in this direction, I fear I should make him appear almost grotesque in his indifference to the things of this world. Suffice it to say he seemed to have become absolutely naturalized as a citizen of heaven, and to be living in the world for the sole object of getting men out of it, and introducing them into the kingdom of God.

You will not wonder perhaps that this utter unworldliness, and this entire indifference alike to the praise and to the blame, to the rewards and to the reproaches of men, should have made him very unacceptable to many Christians. We talk admiringly of apostolic zeal and primitive piety, but let a genuine fragment of this piety suddenly fall into the midst of us, and I am not so certain that it will be greeted with unqualified applause. Extremes can never meet without commotion. A red-hot enthusiasm for Christ plunged suddenly into an element of lukewarm piety, will inevitably produce a hissing and ebullition. Contrariety

of character is sufficient to awaken antagonism even if there is no hostility of spirit. This principle holds everywhere, in doctrine, in life, in morals. The bare, silent presentation of a startling contrast is a signal for disturbance. When Edward Irving, at the height of his popularity, was invited to preach the annual sermon before the London Missionary Society, he set himself to work he tells us by profound study and prayer to reproduce from the gospel a true picture of the Apostolic Missionary. You may study that picture to-day as it stands portrayed in his printed discourse. It is magnificent, eloquent in the highest degree, and yet I do not think any one reading it now can say that it is overdrawn or false to the original. And yet you know, if you have read the story, what a tumult it created when delivered, because doubtless of the startling contrast it suggested between the ancient and the modern policy and methods of missionary labor. He was addressing a society that a little before had greeted with applause the declaration of a speaker who had said, "If I were asked what is the first qualification for a missionary, I would say prudence, and the second prudence, and the third prudence." What wonder that when the picture of the Apostolic Missionary was produced, the man of sublime and dominant faith, "the man without a purse, without a scrip, without a change of raiment; without a staff, without the care of making friends or keeping friends, without the hope or desire of worldly gain, without the apprehension of worldly loss, without the care of life, without the fear of death, of no rank, of no country, of no condition, a man of one thought, the gospel of Christ, a

man of one purpose, the glory of God, a fool, and content to be reckoned a fool for Christ, a madman, and content to be reckoned a madman for Christ"—what wonder that such a picture of self-abandoning and sublimely imprudent faith should have startled, and surprised, and annoyed those to whom prudence seemed the cardinal virtue in a missionary's character.

But if such a picture could offend, how with a living reproduction of the original suddenly presenting himself to the average, worldly, and easy-going Christian? I believe hundreds who knew my missionary friend, Mr. Vassar, would say that he filled out every line and shade of Irving's glowing portrait of "the Missionary after the Apostolic School." I cannot think of one particular in which he came short of it. Well, he did rouse a commotion wherever he went: and the writer whom I have previously quoted, says truly, that "his most vehement opposition came from the class represented by the elder brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son." The respectable, moderate, prudential Christian, whose chief concern is that the religious proprieties be not jostled, was stunned and confounded by his impetuous zeal. The dweller-at-ease in Zion was indignant at the wanton invasion of his comfort which this "hot gospeller" brought. "Yes, we would gladly see men converted," they would say, "but this highly wrought fanaticism, this press-gang method of forcing men into the army of Christ we cannot endure." And so would come charges of insanity made to the face, the old clamor, "Thou art beside thyself." The minister who was harboring this disturber was often warned to

send him away lest the church might be driven to mutiny. And thus as he illustrated marvellously one part of Scripture, "the zeal of thy house hath eaten me up," he received the literal fulfillment of the other part, "the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen on me."

And yet he did nothing to awaken such opposition except to show himself inordinately zealous for men's salvation. He was just what the Bible commands, "instant in season, out of season," or, as one has well translated the words, "unseasonably in season." What others do measuredly, he did with all the energy and intensity of an undivided heart. His reproach, therefore, was justly earned. It was not the dislike of methods, or of the man, but "the reproach of Christ," which may still be esteemed greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. The gospel has a phrase which we dare say is not entirely of primitive application—"the offence of the cross." It is not the preaching of the law with its unsparing penalties, or of the terror of the Lord with its lurid threatenings, that will be most likely to repel men, but the preaching of the cross. Free grace is a greater scandal in the eyes of the moralist and the formalist, than rigid and exacting law. And so inevitable from the nature of the case is the offence of the cross, that it seems to me that any ministry which is not to some extent stamped with the seal and credential of reproach cannot be true. And just as the power of the cross is exhibited in this life in a self-denying earnestness in saving the lost and a Christ-like surrender of all earthly things for the accomplishment of the one end, there will likely be reproach. It will come from the unconverted,

and most certainly from the formalist within the church. For their lives being pitched to no such lofty key, they will not comprehend one who is so keyed. It is the opprobrium of invidious contrast. It is the annoying and startling rebuke, which absolute consecration must inevitably cast upon a worldly and self-indulgent Christianity.

But when we have witnessed such a life, what a charm it must have for every one that values the heavenly world above the earthly, and has more respect to the recompense of reward which Christ offers than to anything which the world can give. It is not poetry; it is not romance. It has been proved in a practical, real life, lived among us, that one may take joyfully rejection, dislike, and contempt, who has the testimony that he is pleasing God. What matters it to him if he is deemed eccentric, if he knows himself to be moving in the orbit which Christ by his own life and command has fixed for him. All that are out of that orbit will wonder, some with great admiration, and many with great perplexity. This will be the inevitable fact.

*"He who far off beholds another dancing,
Even he who dances best, and all the time
Hears not the music that he dances to,
Thinks him a madman, apprehending not
The law which moves his else eccentric motion;
So he that's in himself insensible
Of love's sweet influence, misjudges him
Who moves according to love's melody.
And knowing not that all these sighs and tears*

*Ejaculations and impatiences,
Are necessary changes of a measure
Which the Divine Musician plays, may call
The lover crazy—which he would not do,
Did he within his own heart bear the tune
Played by the great Musician of the world."*

I have thus sketched this life, wishing that I might by my description of it produce on others something of the impression which the reality made on my own mind. I can truly say that I never received such quickening and inspiration from any living person. And though I cannot follow his steps, I trace those steps with the intensest admiration. A life so absolutely given up to God that I believe it would have been literally impossible to have given any more: communion with God so unbroken that it may be justly said that the language of earth, its chatter, its frivolity, its idle speaking, was a foreign speech to him, while the language of heaven was his true "mother tongue."—However far we may confess ourselves removed from it, we shall all doubtless be ready to say that it is supremely blessed to live such a life: the body, the soul and spirit all given up to God, to win souls to Christ an over-mastering passion, all that earth can offer of joy or contempt but dust in the balance, compared with the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Such we believe to be a true picture of this noble life. If the volume now sent forth shall be used of God to quicken the halting steps of any sluggish Christian, to kindle fresh

inspiration in the bosom of any already zealous and earnest Christian, or to give new courage to any fainting Christian, it will have served the end of its publication.

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UNCLE JOHN VASSAR

CHAPTER I

THE RECRUIT

WHO John E. Vassar was, whence he came, and what were the moulding influences of his early life, are not to-day familiar facts. It may be well, therefore, to trace and briefly tell the story. In character, as in creation, what is visible is often the effect of causes working and shaping far away.

The Vassar family was French Huguenot. About the beginning of the eighteenth century some of its members crossed the English Channel, and in the rich agricultural county of Norfolk found a home. Here at wool-growing and farming three generations lived, and mainly died. Here Thomas Vassar, the father of John E., was born, and spent nearly forty years.

But he and his brothers were Dissenters, of the Baptist faith, and like other nonconformists winced under the oppressions and exactions and disabilities imposed by the wedded Church and State. Hundreds whose love of native land was sincere and fervent were driven abroad, to gain the religious liberty which a country, made cruel by its fears, denied.

It was in this exodus that Thomas Vassar, then un-

married, and his younger brother James, started across the Atlantic, not so much in quest of fame or fortune as "freedom to worship God."

One October day of 1796 the good ship "Criterion," with the emigrants on board, sailed up New York Bay. The following spring the Vassar brothers settled near Poughkeepsie on the Hudson, then a village of some four or five hundred souls. For some time the brothers carried on farming operations together, Thomas meanwhile returning to their native land for implements and seeds. Several years later he established the well-known brickyard on the Dutchess Turnpike, a mile or two out of town.

He had previously married Joanna Ellison of Flatbush, Long Island, whose father kept a somewhat noted academy there. The wife was twenty years the husband's junior, and one of those unselfish souls whose life, spent in bearing others' burdens, is in the home or the community a benediction. Letters written by her when she was seventy-five years of age are models of penmanship and good terse English, and reveal a heart as tender as a child's.

The husband was a sunny, cheery, lively man, loved and respected by all who knew him. He was gifted with an unusually retentive memory, a vivid imagination and a strong intellect. Both young and old listened with the keenest delight to his descriptions of English life and especially to the retelling of the old, old story from the Word of God. He was a most vigorous and energetic man, always active in some worthwhile occupation. He was honest to the core and ready for every neighborly act or

office, and never happier than when, with children or grandchildren on his knee, he talked of the dear old home beyond the deep, or the one holier and fairer far, eternal in the heavens. To their memory he stands out still as one who needed little change to fit him for companionship with the saints in light. From his nineteenth to his ninety-third year he walked with God, and then, while his hands were uplifted in blessing and on his lips lingered some of the great apostle's sweetest words, he found himself suddenly and safely landed on the shores of immortality.

Of these parents, John Ellison Vassar, the fourth child in a family of six, was born on the 13th day of January, 1813. He was named after Dr. John Ellison, his mother's only brother, who, after studying medicine abroad, settled near Paris, practised successfully at his profession, and died there while his namesake was yet young.

The child is father of the man or as the Germans say "As the boy so the man." John Vassar, as a boy, was wide-awake, energetic, affectionate, fun-loving, impulsive, courageous, quick-tempered, popular, and a natural born leader, early displaying certain characteristics which developed, controlled and directed produced a manhood of far-reaching and commanding influence.

He enjoyed few of the educational, recreational and family advantages of the average boy of today. His parents were very poor, but respectable and in their struggle for a livelihood required his hard working cooperation while he was but a child. His educational advantages were limited to three winters in an ordinary district school with further studies at home under parental instruction. His

parents were far better educated than most of their associates, and yet John Vassar by keen observation, vigorous mentality and a persistent self-education became an exceptionally well informed man capable of expressing himself in terse, forceful and polished diction.

Circumstances brought to an early end his school opportunities and forced him into a life of hard and heavy labor. He had a bright, active mind, but patient, rigid application to books would never have suited him so well as hard, heavy work. To that he early bent his back. At twelve years old he is in the brickyard. His body is small, but it is sturdy, and his spirit is plucky; so while scarcely more than a child he is said to have filled a man's place. While thus employed, and somewhere about his twentieth year, an accident befell him, from the effects of which he was never altogether free. In hurrying across a rude log-bridge which spanned a creek near the house, one leg somehow slipped through, and was so badly broken as to produce permanent lameness.

Laid aside for many weeks, it was the hope and prayer of his parents that the misfortune might bring seriousness and salvation to their child. But trouble does not always work that way. It is one thing to worry over calamity; it is another to weep over sin. Recovery came, but not conversion. The ripple of uneasiness settled down. The old life of profanity and prayerlessness came rushing back, and along the old channels it pushed its way. God was forgotten. Eternity faded from the thoughts like a passing dream.

So time ran on till he had begun his twenty-fifth year.

Then he married, and moving into Poughkeepsie commenced housekeeping, and working in the malt-house or brewery there. The wife chosen was one Mary Lee. Like himself, she had been blest with praying parents. Like him, she was religiously careless and indifferent. He is now started out in life. His home is pleasant; his health is perfect; his prospects fair. What more can be asked? Nothing, if this world were all. Nothing, if there were not a soul which came from God, and can never rest till it comes to God again. So far John Vassar had kept himself an alien from the commonwealth of Israel. And he tries, as many are trying still, to be happy there. But this smooth complacency or self-satisfaction is about to be broken up. Infinite Love will not suffer a soul to content itself always with the getting and keeping and minding of earthly things. The time has come for him to listen to God's call and throw himself entirely and eternally into the Saviour's ranks.

Before turning at length to the life-story of Uncle John Vassar with its remarkable and at times surprising development it is worth while to pause for a further consideration of his ancestry and also of certain marked characteristics of his life as a whole.

Great is the mystery of the human personality. In every life there are certain ancestral reserves and resources for good or evil which become manifest in emergencies or are revived by unusual demands. This was illustrated to a remarkable degree in the life of Uncle John Vassar. The Huguenot fidelity to the Word of God, that unquestioning belief in the eternal verities, that fearless crusading zeal

and that passion for the Christian faith, which at times had been quiescent in the Vassar family flamed forth in a sane and splendid spiritual enthusiasm in him. This Spirit-filled life made constant requisition on his ancestral reserves with most significant and effective results.

Just as Uncle John Vassar in his young and vigorous manhood crosses the threshold which so definitely separated his old life of profanity, religious indifference and godlessness from the life of complete and absolute consecration to the service of the cause of Christ an appraisal of certain characteristics of this man will aid to a better understanding of his remarkable career.

John Vassar was endowed with those intellectual qualifications which if fully exercised would have made him a distinguished scholar. This is evident from his unusual familiarity with the Scriptures and his ability to interpret and to use them most effectively. But he was not a man of the cloister, rather the man for active contact with other men.

He possessed exceptional social gifts which enabled him to meet acceptably all classes and conditions of men. By an instinctive intuition he seemed to know the character and thought of those with whom he associated. His quick and keen analysis of others was surprisingly accurate.

It was often said of him that he would have been a leader in the business world had he turned his activities in that direction. And those who often heard him speak declared that at times he spoke with a finished and persuasive eloquence of the highest order.

Uncle John Vassar's one supreme life objective was

soul-winning and in this respect he was undoubtedly one of the most successful of our American evangelists. The number reached by his addresses and personal evangelism easily extends into the tens of thousands.

One other characteristic deserves mention, his abounding cheerfulness and overflowing happiness. About the only thing which would drive the smile from his face was solicitude for a suffering or sinning soul.

It should occasion no surprise then that one who had so unreservedly consecrated all his talents and powers to the cause of Christ should receive from the Triune God constant blessing and help.

CHAPTER II

MUSTERED IN

SOME incidents of childhood are cut into memory as inscriptions are cut into rock. No lapse of time wears them out, or tones down the sharp deep lines. One such is associated with the conversion of Uncle John. He had come out to see his parents and tell them what a Saviour he had found. The writer was at grandfather's when he arrived. What he said we were too young to understand, and not one utterance can now be recalled; but the recollection of the scene that followed is perfectly distinct. All wept while his story was being told. Presently they knelt around the room, and two or three offered prayer. In the old homestead there was a holy quiet joy all day long. It was the history of the prodigal repeated. Another runaway had come to himself, and had returned to the Father's house, and under the earthly father's roof there was gladness devout and deep. Shall we doubt that it was the echo of a delight felt in heaven over the repenting sinner?

Uncle John's awakening, like everything about the man, was extraordinary. It is doubtful whether John Bunyan's or John Newton's was more powerful or profound. In the Baptist Church a revival was in progress, and early morning meetings as well as evening services were being

held. He was urged to attend these, but in the most decided way refused. Finally his cousin, Matthew Vassar, Jr., hired him to go "just once." He went, and readily promised to do the same again without reward. Before the second service was over, conviction deep and powerful took possession of his soul. For a week he was shaken by the powers of the world to come as trees are shaken by mighty winds. Say what we will about what old divines were wont to call "law work" in regeneration, John Vassar quivered and struggled for days in its stern grasp. Sin and the woe it merits were awfully real to him—so real, that on going home from one of the meetings and finding his wife asleep, he roused her with the cry, "How can you rest when your husband is going right down to hell?"

It was not the record of a profligate career which stirred shame, fear and pain. He had a fiery, ungovernable temper, and had been given to terrible outbursts of profanity when provoked, but from other gross forms of wickedness he had been free. It was the consciousness of a state of heart radically wrong that lay at the bottom of his self-abhorrence and alarm; the persuasion that outside decency was not the holiness of God. The Holy Spirit was dealing with him, and hence he quailed. And when peace and pardon broke in, they did not come as the dawn of day. It was rather as if noonday sunshine were to flash out in the murky night. He obtained an assurance of sonship so bright and clear that nothing afterward darkened it for an hour.

In part, perhaps, such an experience would be natural to a temperament keyed so high. There could be no half-

way emotion about the man, any more than there could be halfway work. Halfness went against the grain. But it was something more than mere natural intensity which glowed in his face and throbbed in the testimony of his tongue. There was a life hidden with Christ whose pulsations, at the first, as ever afterward, were strong as ocean's undertow. Let this account for those positive ideas he held and urged concerning the doctrine of a new birth. Conversion was to him something definite and discernible. It was not a maybe and maybe not change. There was in his sight a line where living for self and Satan ceased, and living for God and godliness began; and that line he looked upon as sharply drawn. He could not have regarded it otherwise. Divine grace had stopped him as that light from heaven stopped Saul of Tarsus, and as suddenly and as squarely he had turned around. Christ's image had been stamped upon his soul as the eagle is stamped on the bit of gold under the die of the mint; and whose he was, or what, he could not allow himself to question. That had been once and for ever settled. He was twenty-eight years old when he thus found the Lord; rather let us say, when the Lord thus found him. It is the Saviour who is the chief seeker, and not the sinner.

Like every consistent convert he turned to the people of God and asked among them a brother's place. On the 3d of April, 1842, he was welcomed into the fellowship of the Poughkeepsie Baptist Church. Rev. Rufus Babcock, D.D., who thus became his pastor, was for many years his counsellor and guide.

Rev. Edgar A. Van Kleeck of Patten, Maine, for many

years a most cherished friend, and at the time of Uncle John's conversion himself a new recruit in the army of the Lord, gives us this glimpse of the man when as a rebel against God he was brought to lay down his arms: "I well remember the night when he was in such distress of mind, though I myself was then only a child in the Christian life. The meeting was in the little prayer-room of the La Fayette street house, and as many were interested it was filled. I sat next to him in the first seat as one entered from the door. I never saw a soul in such agony as he. The service closed and most of the congregation had retired. As a few were lingering, he begged them not to go but to stop longer and pray for him. He said he could not go out of the room till forgiveness had been spoken and peace had come. A half dozen of us remained and prayed that mercy might be extended and his burden lifted off. Then he broke out into petitions for himself, and such begging for salvation I never heard from the lips of any other penitent. Dr. Babcock stopped with us and tried to point out Christ. Mr. Vassar was more calm before we separated, but by no means at rest. The next night, however, he was rejoicing in a Saviour's pardoning love. There was rapture on his face, there was glory in his soul. There was glory in that old prayer-room, too, as he told us that evening of God's own peace and the preciousness of Jesus.

"After this a number of us were returning from a neighborhood meeting one night where the interest had been very deep, and we were all so full of joy that some began to sing along the street as we went toward home.

This rather unusual manifestation of enthusiasm called out the remark that people would think us crazy if we made so much noise; whereupon Brother Vassar—the child in grace father of the man—at once replied, ‘Let them think so; they said the blessed Jesus had a devil.’”

So we behold Uncle John enlisted for the good fight of faith. How splendidly he fought it we shall see further along. How to fight it he is now to learn. Years are to be spent in the drill-room.

But he has been mustered in.

CHAPTER III

THE DRILL

*"Each of God's soldiers bears
A sword divine;
Stretch out thy trembling hands
To-day for thine."*

ARMS and armor are all-important in sacred as well as in secular warfare, but how to wield the one and wear the other must be learned. The God of battles seldom makes a raw soldier into a great leader all at once. Moses tarries in Horeb, and Elijah in the desert, and Paul in Arabia, to secure the necessary preparation for their work; and with forty days in the wilderness even our Lord's ministry begins. The man we are following here was girded and disciplined in various ways. For these experiences eight years will be none too long.

Naturally enough his voice was quickly heard in the social meetings of the church. But he was a novice in religious things, and needed instruction especially in the word of God. He had not been a member of the Sunday-school, nor a regular church attendant by any means, and was ignorant of Bible truth excepting such scraps and fragments as home-training had given him. This deficiency he sought, far and fast as possible, to supply. In the brewery where he was employed, he would write down

on the walls in the morning two or three short texts to be committed and thought over while at his tasks. On a shelf near by, or else in his pocket, was kept a small Bible, and when there was an unoccupied moment that would be in his hands. Evenings, when no religious service claimed his time, over that same book he would bend for hours, sometimes on his knees. Thus little by little he acquired that familiarity with the written word which he afterward displayed. Many were the instances where he foiled opposers and silenced cavillers, as his Master did the tempter on the mountain, by quotations apt and irresistible.

None of his talents was allowed to rust from disuse. Fast as he received he gave. He believed it as wrong to hoard grace as gold. Communion with Christ was only a holy portal through which to pass to the help of man. He began to talk with individuals about their hope; not so pointedly or skilfully as in later years, for tact and fidelity such as characterized him must partly be acquired. But from the start no one spent half an hour in his presence without being made to feel that with John Vassar religion was a real thing. In the prayer circle and in revival services he became a power. In the schoolhouses out of town, where meetings were often held, his help was sought.

But there were to enter into the drill of the soldier experiences of a sterner kind. If there is a land of Beulah for the Christian to pass through, there is a valley of Baca also. Uncle John is to see a happy home break up, its lights one by one go out, its members pass away, till he is left utterly alone.

Two boys, with the wife, made up his household. The younger sickened first. He died in September, 1847. The elder, a lad of nine years, an uncommonly bright and interesting child, was taken the following autumn, after an illness of but a few hours. He breathed his last in his father's arms, whispering the dear Lord's words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me."

Under these repeated strokes the wife and mother, never strong, gave way. A year of weary wasting and patient suffering followed, and then, in November of 1849, she found the rest remaining to the people of God. That cheerless autumn night was the only time when we ever saw Uncle John even momentarily cast down. Then for half an hour he did lie down and weep like a heart-broken child. Nor was it strange. Long watching had nearly worn him out. Only four weeks previously he had closed his venerable father's eyes for the last long sleep. The loves of earth had been breaking fast. But faith quickly rose again and rejoiced in God. The eagle flies highest not in serene but stormy skies, and the believer beats heavenward when the hours are dark and the tempest wild. The heart of the lonely man recovered soon the old peace and trust, and exulted in the Rock of his salvation. Like the needle of the mariner, deflected for an instant when a storm first strikes the ship, but swinging right and holding steady soon, the smitten soul turned to its Stay and Rest. For those who had gone it was rest and peace. For the one left it was work yet for a little while. With soul new-braced let him go to it—new-braced by sorrow as well as joy; disciplined by loss no less than

gain. He was to be a son of consolation to many a mourner in coming days. He was to minister to smitten spirits with a woman's tenderness. He was to look into eyes dim with tears, and say, "I have been in this very pass, and know its bitterness and blessedness."

It is of these days that his then pastor and lifelong friend, Rev. J. Hyatt Smith, writes: "Brother Vassar was a member of my first charge, and for many Sabbaths at the commencement of my ministry used to help me greatly by looking me right in the eye. One day, as soon as I began my sermon, he put his head down, and did not raise it till the sermon was finished. What it meant I could not tell. This was repeated the next Sabbath, and the next. I asked then an explanation. He replied, 'Beloved, I have a better plan than looking you in the eye. I start even with you, praying while you preach; and to every appealing truth I say, "Lord, send that home. Lord, send that home."' He is the only man who ever helped me by putting down his head while I preached. I drove the nail with the gospel hammer, and he clinched it with believing prayer.

"I shall ever remember how gently he would criticise my sermons, and even his rebukes were so pregnant with the love of Jesus that I was instructed and improved without a hurt.

"In going out on my first round of parish calls, I was told that I would find Brother Vassar at the brewery. I entered the building, and approaching him unobserved, saw a man standing near a great caldron of boiling hops with a book in his hand. Looking over his shoulder, I

noticed that it was 'Fox's Book of Martyrs' that was being read.

"In going out of the place one of the workmen asked, 'Did you find him?' I said, 'Yes.' 'Well,' said he, 'there is one spot in this brewery that is better than any church in Poughkeepsie, and that is where that man prays.'

"Mrs. Vassar was at the point of death. Her disease was consumption, and she feared strangulation. She therefore asked me one day to pray that she might die easily. In the sympathy of the moment I promised, but on meeting Brother Vassar in the next room, I said to him that I had made a hard promise. 'Why?' was his reply. 'Because I have no faith,' was my answer; 'and I have no faith simply because there is no promise.' 'Why,' said he, speaking as a man to a child (and I was only a child in experience), 'if you were the son of a wealthy father who loved you, and would never deny you anything that was for your real good, and you needed a hundred dollars, wouldn't you say, I shall have a hundred dollars, your faith springing from your father's wealth and your father's love?' God's promise was deduced from the knowledge of God's relation to the saint. In that day such a statement was a revelation to me. We went to prayer. Our prayer was answered. Mrs. Vassar died

'As dies a wave along the shore.'"

Of this same period Mrs. R. A. Thurston, of Poughkeepsie, says:

"My acquaintance with John E. Vassar began in the spring of 1849. The first thing about the man that sur-

prised me was, that, with his daily work and the severe sickness then existing in his home, he was able to do so much for Christ and for his fellow-men. He was a peacemaker, a comforter, a helper wherever there was need. Were any cast down? he came with words of hope. Were any indifferent? so earnest and loving and arousing were his words, that the slumbering started into new life. Were any sick, or anxious about salvation? he quickly found it out, and was at their sides. In the social meetings, he was wonderful. In remark or prayer, his face seemed to glow as if heaven had come down, his soul and ours to greet. When we heard his clear voice leading in some sweet song of Zion, we thought that never before were so many rich gifts and graces bestowed on a single man.

"I was in the habit of frequently visiting his sick wife, and often carried some little delicacy along. The morning following her death, unaware that the end had come, I went down to the house with a pitcher containing something for her in my hand. At the door I met Brother Vassar, and asked him to take in what I had brought, that I might hasten back. Claspings his hands together, he said, 'Bless the Lord! my wife is in heaven. She needs nothing more.' I could not understand then how he could rejoice while his dead companion lay in the still and darkened house, but I understand it now. He would not be so selfish as to let his loss outweigh her gain. He would rather rejoice and give God thanks that for her, sorrow and suffering were over, and the eternal glory reached."

One writes, "If there was a truly 'holy' man in that school or church, he was the one entitled to the appellation.

He showed his love to God, not alone by a consistent walk, but by his true-hearted and unselfish love and service of his fellow-men. He was a cheerful, happy Christian, whose ever-welcome presence was sunshine. A cloud was never seen upon his face except when considering another's trials or sufferings, and then he was ever ready with a word of comfort and cheer. In this world's goods he was poor, but his heart was rich in love and tenderness. Of his means he was a cheerful giver. To his pastor he was a devoted friend, and he was as modest and unassuming as he was good."

Another adds:

"Never did he seem in the least degree to lack the spirit of devotion, or to be unready for any Christian service. When all around him were cold he was at white heat, when others were dead, he was full of life. He never came to a meeting however flat and dull that after a little drooping of his head in prayer he did not lift and thrill. It was marvellous beyond expression how quickly he could turn an ebbing tide to flood.

"He had wonderful gifts, few ministers have so much natural ability. At times he was truly eloquent. His experience was rich, his memory marvellous, his use of language extraordinary, his power to rouse the people seldom equalled; and yet with all his gifts and excellencies he was as humble as a little child. He always felt that he was the least of all saints, not meet indeed to be called a saint. He never assumed anything, distrusted himself and was ever ready to give the best place to another. He kept nothing back from his loving Lord. Whether he sang,

prayed, or exhorted, it was all done in the same spirit; or whether he ate or drank or whatever he did, it all was done to the glory of God. He would come into the meeting, slip along quietly from pew to pew, find out every tender-hearted one who was seeking the Saviour, and as soon as there was a lull in the meeting, he would be heard in prayer for the dear soul who was kneeling at his side. Sometimes there would be three or four on their knees before God, all crying for mercy while he was pleading so earnestly in his simple child-like faith that God would save them. Rest was a stranger to him while souls were around him unsaved."

Thus, by fidelity in things at home, he qualified himself for other trusts. He did not belong to that clique of religious perambulators who are more useful anywhere else than in their own homes. He took hold with his brethren of the nearest work he found to do, and so fitted himself for and grew into larger tasks and broader spheres.

Eight or nine years so spent are sufficient, and he goes out now to extensive and efficient service. He has become used to his uniform, and he likes it well. He has learned how to handle the sword of the Spirit, and ward off the assaults of Satan on his shield of faith. He has skirmished with the foe, and found out his strength. His armour has been burnished by affliction till it shines. Above all, loyalty to his Captain has become the passion of his soul. Now he is looking for a place somewhere in the lines. All he asks is a private's position, and less than a private's pay. He will not be kept looking long.

CHAPTER IV

ASSIGNED TO SERVICE

HOME relationships and responsibilities are sometimes influential in keeping men in places and at occupations for which they feel a growing disrelish or dislike. It was so with Uncle John. He had been for many years employed in the malthouse and brewery of "M. Vassar and Company," when the light of God dawned on his soul. Soon afterward he began to feel uncomfortable about his position—began to question whether the work he was doing was consistent with the hope he cherished, and the profession he had made. The Washingtonian Reformation, which a little later swept over many portions of our land, deepened the impression that as a child of God he ought to be otherwise engaged. Duty, however, did not at once grow clear. With the members of the firm, who were his cousins, his relations had been intimate and kind. The temperance sentiment, though it was growing rapidly, was not then as high, either in the church or out, as it is to-day. Then while the subject was being pondered, the repeated household afflictions already noted fell, and they diverted attention from this subject for a time. Soon as he found himself alone in the world, however, the old queries returned. What had been only impressions heretofore deepened into convictions soon, and conviction made

obligation plain. He left the place he so long had filled, whose emoluments, present and prospective, were far greater than he could hope elsewhere to gain, and in the spring of 1850 found himself, for the first time in more than a dozen years, unemployed.

How God could be glorified and his generation served was now the question of the hour. The answer quickly came. The American Tract Society of New York was pushing vigorously the system of colportage in the West. The labors of plain, humble, but godly and earnest men, several hundred of whom were on the field, were being greatly blest—how greatly the revealings of the eternal day alone will tell.

The committee of the Society recognized in Uncle John one suited to their kind of work. They commissioned him on the 15th day of May, 1850. He was not promised anything like ease. "Roughing it" was the order of that day, and the demand. He was not promised very heavy pay in the currency of earth—a hundred and sixty dollars a year and travelling expenses; but he went joyfully to a work that to the last was his delight. For if ever mortal truthfully could say what Christ did, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me," he was that man.

One writing of this time says:

"This was a season of severe trial and hardship to him in some respects. He was an exile from his home, a stranger in a rude country; he often passed his nights in his wagon or on the ground under it.

"God went with him over those grassy solitudes, and blessed his labors, and filled him with joy and praise. At

times his joy was so great that, as he said, 'as the thought of his high calling took possession of him, he could hardly retain his seat in his wagon.' As he urged his way over the wide prairies, he felt that he was the most unworthy and the most favored man on the face of the earth. His heart was filled with Jesus.

"No portion of his life was more fruitful. It was then and there that he acquired that well-nigh infallible skill in approaching men, that was a perpetual marvel to all who observed it. He learned how to tell by a man's look, or by his first words, just what was his state of mind toward religion, and how to address him.

"Every man he met, he sought opportunity to inquire of as to his spiritual state, and if he were not a Christian he warned him, in the name of Christ, and often with tears, of the deceit and danger of sin, and entreated him to forsake it and turn to God, assuring him of the blessedness of so doing, as he, out of his own experience, could testify. He went after men, and kept after them with a long perseverance, holding them in his heart and making mention of them unceasingly before God in his prayers, and appearing to them at intervals, till at last he won them to repentance."

Up to this date we have had little but scattered recollections to put together. Henceforth we have items in his own letters and reports on which to draw, and so can let the laborer himself tell something about his toil.

His field of operations for a year or more was the northern, or north-eastern, portions of Illinois; more particularly the counties of Kane, Kendall, De Kalb, and

Boone. Stopping in Chicago long enough to meet some old friends, and get a supply of the Society's publications for distribution, he struck out for the new settlements a hundred miles beyond. He was now thirty-seven years old, had an almost iron constitution, spirits buoyant as a child's, an all-conquering faith, and a large amount of good sturdy common sense. Add to all this a zeal that never flagged, and it will be seen that he went forth well equipped.

The summer was one of burning drought. The prairies, which on his arrival looked so fresh and green, by July lay scorched and blasted, and men's hearts were failing them for fear. As a consequence, the books he carried sold slowly, and the sultry days and short nights of harvest-time were not favorable for getting hold of the people, either in their homes or through such evening meetings as were tried. He says, however: "I expected difficulties, and am not disappointed in the least. The Lord is a present help. I pass along the highways contented with any fare, and stop where the night overtakes me, witnessing all the time to small and great that Christ has power to save."

With the autumn and early winter tokens of good appear. The more driving labor of the farm is done, and in spite of frets and fear, crops are fair. He writes, "I had a most precious season yesterday. I find the people prepared by God to hear even me, and have been astonished to witness the effect produced by a mere exhortation. Truly our Lord does work by simple means." As spring comes on, the snow-covered prairies that he has

been tramping over, glow religiously, as they do literally with returning summer. Nor is it the country neighborhoods alone that feel the tinglings of a new spiritual life. Belvidere, St. Charles, Elgin, and other towns in his district feel the kindlings of a sacred fire. Along the Wisconsin border are extensive ingatherings of souls. "I have no rest," says the toiler, "night nor day."

And yet he does not forget home and friends amid these joys and cares, for in the letter quoted from above he says: "Oh, Sister H., I never felt so much for our own church before. Do all you can to stir up the brethren. Warn them not to sleep while the world is going so swiftly to ruin. Do all you can for our dear W. and H. We shall meet them in eternity so soon."

While on this field he makes a brief visit to a family previously known in the Eastern States. The home was a Christian one, and the first evening passed rapidly and pleasantly in calling up old times and places. The host spoke hopefully of his prospects and talked over his plans, but made little reference to the subject uppermost in the mind of Uncle John. Presently a good opportunity was given to introduce the matter, and he turned to it by asking these old acquaintances what kind of neighbors they had found. "Really," said the lady, "I scarcely know. I am intimate with almost none of them; and if the truth must be told, I have not sought to be."

"How long did you say you had been living here?"

"Five years next spring," was the reply.

"Five years next spring! Oh, my dear brother and sister, both of you professors of religion and yet living

here so long without even informing yourselves about the condition of those nearest to your doors! What a pity! what a pity! What will the Lord say to you?"

The man and his wife looked at him, looked at one another, and then looked down. Then as he went on to speak of Christian obligation both asked, "What ought we to have done? What could we have done?" As past opportunities were clearly pointed out, the more pertinent query came to their lips, "Well, how can we best take up our neglected duties now?" Definitely he mapped out a plan of labor, and before leaving besought them to put it in operation without delay.

Weeks afterward he was at their door again. Before he entered, the woman of the house greeted him with the exclamation, "I am so glad you have come! You are just in the right time."

He entered and found several of the neighbors who had come together to talk over measures concerning the religious welfare of the community. These old friends of his had not been so plainly and lovingly dealt with in vain. They had shown how sincerely they deplored past unfaithfulness by vigorously taking hold of responsibilities which selfishly or indolently had been shirked. They had scoured the region round about. They had ascertained by going from house to house how many had once named the name of Christ. These had been brought together. Mutual confessions had been made. Old covenants had been renewed. Regular meetings during the week had been established. Occasional preaching for the Sabbath had been secured. A Sunday-school had been organized, and it was but a

little time before the habits of the neighborhood were revolutionized.

How many times he set such a train of influences working only God knows. This incident had altogether dropped from his mind till some unknown friend put it into a tract for circulation and accidentally the tract fell under his eye only three or four years before he died.

In the summer of 1851 he comes East again, to visit his aged mother, and in the autumn he is sent to Cleveland, Ohio, a city in which some of his most effective work was done. This arrangement was effected through his old pastor, Rev. J. Hyatt Smith, at this date prosecuting a most successful ministry in Cleveland. Inclined always to self-depreciation, Uncle John seems apprehensive that his style of labor will not be liked among city circles and cultivated folks. He imagines the backwoods his sphere. He regrets that he was not left there, and makes the new departure with earnest prayers for help. Soon, however, his letters undergo a change. They take on a more cheerful tone. He finds that human nature is much the same, whether in a log-cabin of one room or a brown-stone front on the avenue. Everywhere he is given the most cordial welcome. His books sell as he has never seen them sell before. The churches make most generous collections for the American Tract Society, the Rev. Mr. Smith's contributing six hundred dollars in two days. Nor do they in giving to the service overlook the servant's wants. Thus modestly he mentions a timely gift: "While writing the other evening a gentleman called with a bundle, containing a note from some unknown

friend, a very handsome overcoat, and a pair of gloves. The coat is much too fine and fashionable for me, but the note says I must wear it, so what else can I do?" We shall not misjudge the good man if we suppose that in the new garment he felt more comfortable in going from house to house than in the old one, which had done prairie service. While his tastes were plain, and fashions of little consequence, he liked to be respectably attired, especially where a rusty garb might excite prejudice and impair his usefulness.

More gratifying to him, however, than personal attentions and generous collections, or large sales, was the spiritual quickening which was enjoyed. The details are but meagrely given, the most that he records being in these lines: "I visit frequently forty families a day, have a meeting somewhere every night, and speak to three Sunday-schools where practicable every Lord's day. I have conversed with over three thousand people during the last three months on the subject of personal religion, and feel that for this city a wonderful blessing is in store."

Happily the facts and incidents of that memorable winter can, in part at least, be furnished by those who moved amid them, some of whom, during it, felt the Spirit's touch unto eternal life. What one man did—rather what God through him did—let these in their own way tell.

Rev. George M. Stone, D.D., of Tarrytown, N. Y., thus writes: "My first acquaintance with Uncle John was in Cleveland, Ohio, in the year 1852. He was visiting from house to house, and in that portion of the city a remarkable religious interest was soon manifest. I was then

an unconverted young man about eighteen years of age, and engaged in a printing office. A companion in the office, who had heard of the eloquence of Rev. J. Hyatt Smith, invited me to accompany him one evening to the lecture-room of his church, where meetings were being held. I went, and was interested in the preaching. As I arose to pass out, after the service, I was approached by a person, then a stranger, who asked with mingled earnestness and kindness if I loved the Lord Jesus Christ. He took my hand at the same time, and held it firmly. I can never forget the intense sincerity of that first interview. I felt in a moment that I had never before met a man who possessed such a transcendent consciousness of divine things. That stranger was John E. Vassar, and from that hour convictions began to stir my heart which in time the Holy Spirit used to lead me to Christ."

Hear again his friend Rev. J. Hyatt Smith: "On his way to Illinois as a colporteur of the American Tract Society, he surprised me by calling at my house one day. I urged him to remain a while. He refused, and left that same night on a steamer for Detroit. The boat was so crowded that I was afraid to have him go on board. I remember his look as he replied, 'I rejoice that so many are going. I shall have a blessed time working for souls.' Away he went on an overloaded steamer in a stormy night, and I went to my home praying for him.

"One day Brother Vassar, while in Cleveland, came to me and said, 'To-morrow I am going through Dives Street (Euclid Street), and I want you to pray for me.' I promised him I would, and requested him to report to me the

results of his first day's visit to the houses of wealth on that beautiful avenue. I give a report of his visit to the first house on his journey. At the door of the stately dwelling he met the lady of the house. 'What do you want, sir?' she asked, as he approached her. He replied, 'I am a colporteur for the Tract Society, and'—pointing to his basket of books—'I am selling these.' 'We have a library,' was her reply. 'I don't doubt it,' said Brother Vassar, glancing at the building; 'but,' he continued, nothing daunted by the rather sharp response of the lady, 'the truth is I am legs for Bunyan, Baxter, Flavel, and others. They are all in the basket there.' The lady, evidently struck with the appearance of the man and the quaintness of his address, asked him into the parlor. Having stormed and carried the house, he began an assault upon the castle of the heart. 'I am not only a seller of books, but I am anxious to know if you love Jesus,' said John. 'I am a member of the church,' the woman replied. 'So am I,' said Brother Vassar, 'but I fear that God will not take our church records. He counts the names recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life.' The attack was fairly commenced, and the arrows of love flew thick and fast. Heart Castle surrendered; the lady with tears exclaimed, 'I know it is not enough to belong to a church. You talk like my dear mother. Yes, I trust I do love Jesus.' 'Bless the Lord,' said John, 'that makes us brother and sister. If you love the Saviour, and I see you do, would you not like a season of prayer?' She replied, 'I would be glad to have you pray.' They knelt side by side, and John poured out his soul in supplication. At the close of

the prayer the lady asked, 'What is the price of your books?' 'Which one?' said Brother Vassar. '*All of them,*' was her answer. The calculation was made; then calling a servant she bade him carry them to the library, paid Brother Vassar for them, gave him something for himself, and with tears in her eyes begged him to forgive her manner at the door. 'Don't mention it, my sister,' said Brother Vassar, 'you know what our blessed Master had to bear.'

"His manner in the prayer-meeting, as I remember it in those distant days, and that which I have seen in his later life, was in my judgment much the same. I do not think his character had those stages of growth which mark most Christian men. In Christ Jesus he seemed to have been born a man of full stature. It is said of the river Jordan that, unlike most streams, it does not start with small springs and receive the contributions of rivulets by the way, so attaining fulness, but bursts forth from one vast source, a river rolling to the sea.

"I never met his like in all the varied labors of a saint. He was a master in all the sword exercise of God's Word."

With the Cleveland campaign, service in what might be called the Department of the West, for a season ended. Years afterward he was again on some of these old camp-grounds.

CHAPTER V

OFF ON FURLOUGH

THE summer of 1852 found Uncle John again in his old home. His mother had passed far beyond her threescore and ten years, and growing feebleness indicated that the end was near. The only child remaining with her was a daughter who from girlhood had been frail. It became a question whether duty did not require him to stay where he could smooth the last few months of a parent whose devotion to her children had been unsurpassed. Satisfied that maternal claims were for the present paramount, he dissolved his connection with the Tract Society, and waited tenderly on the failing steps of the mother till October, when he laid her down by the good father's side.

Friends in Poughkeepsie now insisted that there was work enough for him at home, and especially in the temperance line. In many places the so-called "Carson League" had been organized, the chief object of which was to suppress the unlicensed sale of intoxicating drink. This Society pressed him to become its agent in Dutchess County, to bring to justice offenders against law. It is needless to remark that this was a far less congenial employment than telling "the old, old story of Jesus and his love." But the evil to be fought was a trying one,

and what right had any child of God to decline a service simply because it was disagreeable? He would be withstanding sin and Satan still. So he grappled with the whiskey power, and it never found in that region a foe who dealt it heavier blows, or one whom it was so difficult to scare or beat. As religiously as he ever went to his closet to pray, he ferreted out law-breakers in saloons, groceries, taverns, and groggeries, nor rested till a number were inside of prison bars instead of liquor bars, and dozens more, alarmed, gave up the illicit trade. As might be expected, "certain lewd fellows of the baser sort" cursed and threatened and reviled. They hung him in effigy in front of the County Court House with the inscription, "This is John Vassar and the Maine Law." They prosecuted him in court on a charge of assault and battery because one day, in an earnest argument, he held a man for a moment by the arm, when he was about to turn away. They followed him on the streets in hooting rabbles. His life was more than once in jeopardy. One of these attempts to frighten, if not to injure him, let one who witnessed it describe—L. T. Perkins, Esq., of Brooklyn, N. Y., then a Poughkeepsie boy.

"One afternoon he came up Market Street to Main, and up Main to the Gregory House, followed by some two hundred angry men, many of them carrying clubs and threatening his life. He passed through the hotel by a back way, and came down Mill Street to our church, where the usual prayer-meeting was about to begin. I shall never forget the burning enthusiasm of the man as he spoke that night, or the fervor of his prayer. After

the meeting I wanted to go home with him, being fearful that he might be harmed. I know it was absurd to think that my five-foot and hundred-pound body could have done much toward protecting him, but I loved him, and so I wished to go along. As we were coming up the basement steps, our pastor, Rev. Thomas Goodwin, said, 'Here, Brother Vassar, take this cane of mine; I can get along without it, and some of these men may be lurking along the streets and may fall on you.' Uncle John held up both hands and said, 'Brother Goodwin, the Lord has given me these hands for weapons, and they are all I need. If my Master wants John Vassar to-night, nothing can save him. If He does not, all these men combined can't hurt him.'

For two years he thus pushed this work, during which time he saw his steadfast friend, the late George W. Sterling, sent to the State Legislature from the Poughkeepsie district, on a straight-out temperance ticket, and other triumphs won neither few nor small. Concerning these days this is about all the record we have from his own hand: "I look back with wonder to see how much the Lord has brought me through. Blessed be His holy name. I have visited the nineteen towns of the county, and some of them twice over. I have walked on an average twenty miles a day, and spoken publicly about every night. I believe some good has been done, but I take to myself no praise. I am an unprofitable servant anywhere, and far too little concerned for any good cause."

Toward the close of these labors—in December, 1854—he was married to Miss Harriet M. Brownson, formerly

of Monticello, Sullivan County, N. Y., and at the date of the marriage a very active member of the Poughkeepsie church. In entering into this new relation it was understood that the remainder of his life was to be devoted to evangelistic labor, and that this labor would be likely to make of him literally a pilgrim and stranger, having no continuing city, no permanent or settled home. Animated by much of his spirit, the wife sought in nowise to hold him back, but at the first, as ever afterward, consented readily to such separations as long absences required, and such an increase of care and duty as they might bring. Bible work, in his native county, claimed his attention for six months or more. The object in securing him was to effect if possible an entrance into every house of the county, and the putting of a copy of God's Word in every home where it was not found. No other man had ever made so thorough a canvass of that field as John Vassar. From the shanties of the coal-burners on Fishkill Mountains, to the mansions of the wealthiest in the towns he went, and in almost every instance was well received.

The wide acquaintance thus acquired led the Dutchess Baptist Association to recognize in him the man above all others to undertake mission work within their bounds. These years were years of growth such as his own denomination had not known through that region for a long while. The revival spirit went from church to church. Drowsy Christians started up where he came, as sleeping soldiers at bugle call. Formal professors thawed out into a spring-time of devotion as frozen clods thaw out when

April winds breathe across the fields. Hundreds bowed as penitent sinners at the Saviour's feet, and rose to walk in newness of life with their risen Lord.

Rev. W. O. Holman, of Bunker Hill Church, Boston, writes: "I was studying for the ministry in the city of New York, and was supplying the Baptist church in Amenia, twenty-five miles east of Poughkeepsie, a church which was at the time pastorless, when our acquaintance began. A revival had broken out in our meetings, and Uncle John was soon on hand. One Sunday, while I was preaching, a short, thick-set man, with a genial countenance, came in. He took a seat near the pulpit, and putting his eyes intently on me kept his lips moving, as if in assent or prayer. At the close of the service he grasped my hand, and was so hearty and cordial and enthusiastic that I was almost repelled. He interested me nevertheless, and we were soon the best of friends. Blessed be God for the hour that brought us together. I have known many a good man after the flesh, but never another such as he.

"Together we travelled from house to house, over hill and dale, through cold and snow, rain and sunshine, seeking for sinners to lead to Christ. Never shall I forget his apt, earnest, pointed appeals. The fruits of that meeting were glorious. Old feuds among believers were healed, and from fifty to seventy souls converted to the Lord. A year or more afterward I was ordained and settled at Poughkeepsie, and so became Uncle John's pastor. There we worked together in a most blessed season in the spring of 1858. On a single Sabbath I was privi-

leged to give the hand of fellowship to sixty-three new believers, many of whom still survive, and some of whom were permitted to drop the tear of affection over one who helped guide their returning feet to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls.

Rev. J. Donnelly, of Ionia, Michigan, says: "In August of 1858 Uncle John came out to Beekman, where I, then a student at Hamilton, was supplying the church. I shall never forget the day he came to my study. I was busy writing out a sermon for Sunday, and was about half done, when a rap at my door brought him in. Greetings were soon exchanged, a season of prayer followed, and in thirty minutes from the time he entered we were out calling and at missionary work. I did not see how I could go, at first, and leave my sermon unfinished. But I went. That sermon was never finished. Before Sunday came, ay, before the first night, there were anxious souls inquiring after Christ, and my subject had to be changed. Over forty-five persons, as the result of the work thus begun, were added to the church, and of the human agencies employed Uncle John must be accounted first. For what I then and there learned, for the breaking-in I received in the matter of dealing with souls, I have thanked John Vassar since a thousand times. During this revival I was much with him, and can testify that the last thing before his eyes closed was prayer, and the first when his eyes opened. After an experience of twenty years I am free to say that I never knew a man who prayed so much, and I never knew a man who lived so constantly in the sunshine of a Saviour's presence and

love. If ever a man lived Christ, it was John E. Vassar."

Rev. J. L. Benedict, of White Plains, N. Y., gives this account: "On entering the village of Beekman on a visit to my friend, who was supplying the little church there, I did not know just where to find him; so, accosting a man who was nearing me and walking very fast, I inquired. The stranger thus addressed pointed out the place, and in the next breath said, 'Are you a Christian, my young friend?' I answered that I hoped I was. A few more words passed, and then he went on, remarking that he was 'in a hurry to look up some sheep.' After greeting my fellow-student, and being introduced to the family in which he made his home, I remarked that I had just met a crazy man up the road in search of some sheep. The whole group laughed outright, and my friend said, 'Why, that was John Vassar, our county missionary; and the sheep that he is in search of are the Lord's.' A few days afterward Uncle John wished me to accompany him to the old Fishkill church, a few miles below, where the venerable Elder Robinson had preached for many years. This aged minister was not friendly to protracted meetings, yet he and his church had confidence in Uncle John, and readily consented to open their house of worship for a week. The very first evening five young men rose for prayer, and within a month between thirty and forty made a public profession of their faith. One day I accompanied Uncle John in his visits, and we called at the house of Mr. S., where there were several young unconverted people. On our approach they ran into another room to get out of the way. He saw the movement,

and went straight in where they were. Then, with all the tender sympathy of his great heart, he entreated them to yield to Christ, and falling on his knees pleaded for them separately each by name. Before we left the house they were in tears, and were praying for themselves. They all became living witnesses for Christ. During the course of the day we stopped under the shade of a large oak to rest, and while stopping there I took occasion to ask him if he always thus followed up those who sought to avoid him. He replied that he did not, that ordinarily it might irritate them, but that in cases where he believed the Spirit of God was working, and especially in revival seasons, he would so hunt them up.

"Many years have passed since I spent those three happy weeks with John E. Vassar, but I learned more practical theology, more about the working of God's Spirit on the hearts of men, more about the way to deal with the impenitent or awakened, than in any like period of my life. Indeed, the keynote to my life-work in the ministry I got then and there.

"He once gave me an idea never to be forgotten. Something was being said about ill-treatment which he had encountered, on a certain visit. He quickly replied, 'A sinner cannot abuse old John Vassar. The poor lost soul! oh, how I love him!'

"A marked trait in his character was his love for God's ministers. No unjust or severe criticism ever escaped his lips. They were the Lord's chosen messengers, and he loved them for the Master's sake. The affection between him and Mr. Post was mutual and very strong. It is no

less strong now that they see the King in His beauty, and are forever with the Lord.”

Another interesting incident is recorded by a friend: “I cannot now name the date, but about twenty years ago Mr. S. was drawing a load along the road when he met a stranger, who stopped and said, ‘What may I call your name, sir?’ The one addressed replied, ‘My name is S.’ ‘Ah, you are a deacon in the church here, are you not?’ was the response. ‘I am, sir,’ was the answer. ‘Well, deacon,’ said the stranger, ‘my name is Vassar—John Vassar; now, is your wife a Christian?’ ‘I am sorry to say that she is not.’ ‘Have you any objection to my calling and conversing with your family?’ ‘Not the least, not the least.’ ‘God bless you, Brother S. Good morning.’ Uncle John passed along, and the deacon went on and turned into a field with his load. He had not gone more than thirty rods when the thought came to him, ‘How is this? Here is a stranger more concerned for the salvation of my household than I am. This is not right. This won’t do.’ Mr. S. jumped off his load, unhitched the horses from the sled, tied them, and started for the house. He arrived just in time to hear the prayer. That load was not moved again for six weeks. Mrs. S. was converted, and forty-two others united with the Kent and East Fishkill Church.”

For obvious reasons the following touching statement is given without its author’s name:

“Uncle John came to my father’s house for the first time more than a quarter of a century ago. My father was at that time an inebriate, and our home was suffering

under the blight of rum. His coming was the beginning of better days. It resulted in the conversion of the father and all seven of us children. Two of the children are now in the ministry, two others, together with the parents, have died in hope, and we are waiting for a happy family reunion on the river's other side.

"He had scores of stories to tell. One of his experiences during this period, as he related it, I vividly remember. I will give only its main features, not attempting to repeat his words.

"He went to one place which had long been under the blight of spiritual declension, and where among the youth of the community there was not a single professing Christian. He was informed that the leading spirit in the social life of the place was a young woman—that her influence was commanding, and that it was used against religion. If she could be won to Christ, a great point would be gained. So Uncle John went to see her first. As soon as she understood the object of his visit, she rudely refused to listen to him, and bade him begone forthwith without another word. He left her, and went calling elsewhere. And presently about everybody he met treated him coldly. At a number of houses he was denied admission, in one instance with violent words. He did not know what to make of it. But the explanation soon came out. The young woman he had first visited, in her extreme anger at him, had declared that he had offered her an insult, and the falsehood was going the rounds, and was everywhere ahead of him.

"This fact, he said when he first discovered it, seemed

to him the most mysterious providence he had ever heard of. 'O Lord, what does it mean?' he cried in dismay. His work was completely blocked. There was no help for it; and he had to go. Wondering greatly, but submitting, he went to another field some distance away, and began laboring there. He had been there awhile, and was seeing hopeful signs of good, when one evening as he was holding a meeting in a schoolhouse, he heard a large, heavily-loaded sleigh drive up and stop at the door. When the door was opened, there appeared a party of some twenty young people, with the young woman before mentioned at their head. Mr. Vassar's first thought was that they had come to mob him or do him harm of some sort. They came in, the whole company, all strangers, and the silence that followed was broken by the young woman standing forth and saying, in a trembling voice, 'Mr. Vassar, I have brought these friends of mine with me to hear me ask your forgiveness for the great wrong I did you when you were in our place. Telling that lie was the meanest thing I ever did. That I could tell it, and that I felt like telling it, for such a cause, showed me as I never saw it before, the wickedness of my heart—my state as a sinner. It has led me, I trust, to ask God's forgiveness, and I hope that for Christ's sake he has heard my prayer. Will you forgive me, too?' "

"One day, while walking from Poughkeepsie to Pleasant Valley, he overtook a man driving an ox-team along the road. Walking on together in conversation it was but a minute or two before the Name that is above every name was on the lips of Uncle John, and the subject ever upper-

most was broached. With the utmost frankness, and with a trembling voice, the man declared that for weeks he had been secretly trying to grope his way to God. He had said nothing to any one, and no one had said anything to him. All was uncertainty with him and gloom. That Saviour who "must needs go through Samaria" so long ago, because there was a lost soul waiting to hear words of life, sent the right man to this inquiring soul that day. Uncle John knew how to meet a case like that. His words fitted that penitent's wants as the notch in the arrow is fitted to the string of the archer's bow. The mode of a sinner's acceptance was seen that very hour. By the roadside they knelt in prayer together, and then they parted, this convert, like one in the olden time, going on his way rejoicing.

"Hardly had they separated before Uncle John saw a man ploughing in a field some distance from the highway. All aglow with the recent interview the question started, "May I not find yonder another such a case? Who knows?" Across the lot he hurried, and strange as it may seem, he did find another soul anxious and ready to accept of Christ. In the freshly turned furrows the two knelt, and either then or very soon afterward the peace of God entered this heart too.

"On another occasion he saw a man in the field husking corn. Uncle John said, 'Let us kneel down here and pray, and then go after him.' They did so. As soon as he began to talk with him he found out that he was a man at whose house he had just called. He had a wife and three children, and none of them entertained a hope of par-

doned sin. He was invited first to attend the meeting. He refused flatly, declared he was a Universalist, but admitted that he never prayed. Then Uncle John poured out upon him all the truth of God. He never was more valiant for his Master. With tears streaming down his cheeks the man said, 'Pray for me,' and down among the stalks they bowed, and prayed. He and three others from his family were soon in the kingdom.

"This scene is one of many. Strong oaks on every hand bowed before the mighty on-movings of God's all-conquering grace.

"He one day met a man on the road, resting his team, who, on being approached, loudly avowed himself an infidel. So tremendous was the pressure under which Uncle John put him that in five minutes, with wonder and penitence written on his face, he gladly bowed to have prayer offered in his behalf, and on arising and parting he said, 'I need this Saviour, and will seek Him.'"

One evening, as he was going into meeting, we met a gentleman near the door. Uncle John addressed him courteously, and said, "My dear friend, do you love Jesus?" Said the gentleman, "I do not know that that concerns you, sir." "Oh, yes, it does," said Uncle John; "in these days of rebellion does it not concern every citizen as to which side every other citizen may take? How much more when a world is in rebellion against God should we be concerned to know who is on the Lord's side." The man's lips were sealed. Before the meeting was over he rose and asked the prayers of God's people. And thus it was in every

case. I certainly saw him personally address hundreds, and in no solitary instance was he repulsed.

But by this time some one is ready to ask, what was meant by heading this chapter "Off on Furlough"? They reasonably and naturally ask, where the furlough for Uncle John has come in? Well, if by furlough is signified resting spell, he has not yet found it, nor did he ever find it till the last months of life were being spent. But these varied engagements and miscellaneous services came in after retiring from his first Tract Society labors, and before returning to its employ.

When his work in the Dutchess Association closed he had sixteen years yet to stay on earth. They were the most eventful and fruitful of his life. He goes to work now on a broader field. We will follow him there.

CHAPTER VI

GOING TO THE FRONT

THE dark days of 1861 came on. The nation was drifting into war. Few believed it, however, till the blow was absolutely struck. Then loyal millions arose and with one voice said, "Die who will or may, this land must live."

Everywhere were heard the shoutings of captains, the rattle of armor, the tramp of marching feet. Uncle John had been opposed to war. He had looked upon it as always a calamity, and frequently a crime. Again and again, regarding it through his strong affections and tender sympathies, he had shudderingly cried, "How long, O Lord, how long?" He had seen in the foe defeated and plundered a man and a brother. He had glimpsed the mutilations and barbarities and butcheries which war of necessity involved. He had heard the wails of orphanage and widowhood, and so recoiled from every appeal to arms.

But when the cup of trembling was put into his country's hands, and put into its hands unsought, he saw, as others did, that whatever its bitterness it must not be pushed away. For two years he listened, as did many heavy hearts, to tidings of drawn battles or defeats. Then he felt that his time had come, and that he had found his work. It was not to serve in the ranks: he was too old

for that. It was not to act as an officer : for that he had no training and no taste. Another and a higher call was in his ears. There were sick and suffering men to be ministered to temporally and spiritually. That should be his task. He went to the Tract Society again, and asked if he could not have a new commission, a commission to engage in army labor. It was granted him in June, 1863, and he was soon inside the Federal lines.

Lee had started northward on that last invasion which he ever ventured, and upon whose issues half a dozen States a little later hung breathlessly. Hooker's army was in full pursuit. The excitement was at white heat all over Maryland and along the Pennsylvania line. The cloud gathering so blackly was about to break. The rival hosts drew closer together, and finally grappled in one of the deadliest struggles of these latter days, on the ridges and slopes around Gettysburg.

It was the Sunday before the fight. The old Army of the Potomac lay stretched from Frederick City southward along the Monocacy. The "One Hundred and Fiftieth New York," of which the writer was chaplain, had camped on a rough hillside. The regiment had as yet seen but little service; the march for days had been heavy; no one knew what moment orders might come to move on: so our meeting had been a short one and a small one that day. As it was closing, who should come in but Uncle John! These were all Dutchess County men, hundreds of whom he knew. Tired as they were, they were not too tired to welcome him. Moreover, he was recently

from home, and to grasp his hand and listen to his voice seemed half as good as being there.

Before daylight the advance was sounded, and all were tumbling out and falling into line. The columns went pushing along the artillery-rutted roads as if on a race toward those Pennsylvania hills. Uncle John was fifty years old or more, but he kept up with the best. Not only kept up, but often would shoulder for a mile or two the gun or knapsack of some poor fellow ready to give out. We missed him before getting to Gettysburg, and weeks passed before our men again saw his face. After the fight was over he became separated in some way from our troops, and was captured by Stuart's cavalry. When brought into the presence of the general and questioned as a suspected spy, he instantly dissipated the suspicions of the officers by his frank and fearless words for the Master. "I am working as a colporteur of the American Tract Society, to try and save the souls of the dear boys that fall around me daily. General, do you love Jesus?" The General fenced the question with, "I know that good old Society, and have no fear of its emissaries." "But, my dear general, do you love Jesus?" The puzzled officer was relieved by the suggestion of those who had arrested Uncle John, and who were already restive under his close questionings. "General," said they, "take the man's promise that he will not tell of our whereabouts for twenty-four hours, and let us see him out of our lines, *or we will have a prayer-meeting from here to Richmond.*" And so it was decided. He made his way back into the Union lines, and was once more among friends.

He was only inside of the Confederate camp about ten hours, but it is doubtful whether in a like space so much Gospel was ever urged upon the men he met. And their supposition that he would have kept it up had he been held longer was perfectly correct. Had he been put in the foulest corner of Libby Prison, or Castle Thunder, the story of salvation would have rung there as it did in the jail at Philippi so long ago.

How he employed himself in the army one of the chaplains, Rev. E. J. Hamilton, tells us in a racy little sketch of the man which he prepared for publication while the war was yet going on. "Mark him as he enters camp. In his cheery way he says, 'How are you, dear boys? I am glad to see you. I guess I have a little something for you; I was thinking you would be wanting some paper or needles, for the paymaster has not been around in a good while, has he? I cannot carry much, but just step up, boys, and I will give you what I have.' Both his hands are busy dispensing sheets of paper, and pens, and thread, with skilful and impartial generosity. After these gifts tracts and religious reading are produced from the black satchel, and distributed to many glad recipients. Now his stock is exhausted, and after some excellent story or terse remark, he adds, 'Now, boys, don't forget the prayer-meeting the chaplain is going to have this evening. Come, dear boys, and let us ask God to bless us.' 'We will, we will,' is the response of many voices, and possibly the evening hour will show that the invitation has been accepted by many silent, softened hearts that did not dare to speak. In the prayer-meeting he is a great power, for

he generally imparts to his fellow-worshippers much of his own spirit. I first met him in the log church of our brigade. On that occasion he moved us all. After this I was going away for ten days, and asked him to look after my boys. He consented. On my return I was prepared for something of a revival, but not to learn that the chapel was crowded, and that meetings were kept up three times a day. When I entered it that afternoon what a scene presented itself! The place was half Babel, half Bochim. Many of the soldiers were kneeling, some praying, some sobbing, some groaning, some loudly responding. Uncle John was seemingly the most engaged of all. After the principal prayer was over he rose and in his sweet tenor voice began a favorite hymn. All joined, and the praise went up through the white trembling canvas roof. He had instituted the morning assembly for inquirers and young converts, that in the afternoon for the prayers and exhortations of Christians generally, while more formal exercises occupied the meeting at night.

"The evening service was the most important. Generally there was a sermon by one of the chaplains, after which those who loved the Lord and those who desired to do so were requested to remain. Commonly very few went away, and then Uncle John's work began. After some prayers and hymns he would make a short address, and conclude by asking those who felt themselves in need of salvation and who desired Christians to pray for them to stand up. And then what earnestness in persuading sinners to declare for Christ! He would look over the assembly sometimes for a minute till some one rose.

'There's one,' says Uncle John, with visible emotion. 'Bless the Lord. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.' Then after a short pause he would add in the most inviting tones, 'And is there no other precious soul here that wants a Saviour? Yes, there's another. God bless you, dear brother. Oh, it was for such that Jesus died. Jesus, the Son of God,' and Uncle John would sing,

*'He died for you,
He died for me,
He died to set poor sinners free;
Oh, who's like Jesus
That died on the tree?'*

"Another pause. 'And is there not another one who wants to love this blessed Saviour? Yes, I see you, dear brother. I knew there would be more. I feel that God is here to-night. And there's another, and another, and another. Oh, praise the Lord! Precious Saviour, thy blood cleanses a universe from guilt.' In this way he would go on till perhaps a dozen or twenty had risen; then the meeting would be dismissed, and Uncle John and the chaplains would tarry with the anxious, conversing and praying according to the need of each individual case.

"During such an awakening Uncle John labors night and day. As he set out one morning to follow the impressions of the previous evening I went with him down the company streets. Entering a tent where two out of the four occupants were Christians, he addressed himself to each man and led in a short prayer. Then he asked for

a sergeant whom he knew to be under deep conviction. The young man came in. Uncle John read the look of trouble on his face, and sadly and tenderly said, 'O Albert, Albert, my boy, haven't you given your heart to the Saviour yet? What is the matter? Why don't you throw everything else away and trust only in the Lord Jesus?' The young man answered that he was trying to do that, but could not find any peace. We all knelt down in the little shanty which barely held us, and the chaplain led in prayer. Then Uncle John said, 'Now, Albert, you pray.' The lad offered a few simple, earnest petitions, and we left him. Several days afterward I met him going to one of the meetings with a shining face. 'Well, Albert,' said I, 'how do you feel to-day?' 'Oh, bright as a shilling, chaplain,' was the singular but expressive reply. And bright ever since has been his Christian character and course.

"His fidelity is unsparing. 'Uncle John,' said one captain, 'I try to do my duty, and I think that is all that is required of me.' 'Why, captain,' answered the honest man, in tones of astonishment, 'how can you say so? No man does his duty who does not give his heart to God, and live in God's service. What would you think of a man brought up by a kind father, and provided by him with every means of happiness, who should be a good brother and husband and neighbor and citizen, and yet be a heartless and undutiful son? Don't you think his wickedness would be unspeakably great?' 'But the cases are different,' rejoined the captain. 'No, they are not,' said Uncle John. 'That man would be condemned by the moral

sense of the community; and the godless sinner, you may depend upon it, will be condemned by the public opinion of the universe.'

"Nearly one hundred and fifty—one tenth of our whole brigade—professed faith in Christ during these services thus carried on. Many are in soldiers' graves, some are at home sick or wounded, some are in Southern prisons, but so far as I know the great majority have shown that their profession was well founded.

"On one occasion, I cannot say whether I was more amused to see the familiar yet respectful assurance, or gratified to witness the startling directness with which he interrogated a brave colonel whom he had never seen before. A meeting had been concluded in front of the headquarters tent, and Uncle John had conversed and prayed with a young man who had shown deep conviction and anxiety regarding his sins. Utterly unconscious of human presence, and with a simplicity and earnestness which rose above all influences of time and place, and surrounded themselves with their own proprieties—silence, solemnity, and attention—he knelt with the lad in the midst of a crowd of bystanders, and prayed for him, for his comrades, for the officers of the regiment, and for the whole army. The vigorous colloquial language of the prayer, and its particularizing petitions, in which names and places and circumstances were freely mentioned, interested and impressed the hearers of it. Conventionalities plainly had little to do with Uncle John's religion. The young man went away comforted, and trusting in God; and the crowd dispersed. Then we entered the

colonel's tent, in which we found one or two officers of the command, together with their chief. After a few words of conversation regarding the history of the regiment and its part in the summer's campaign, in which it had lost heavily, Uncle John remarked that it was a blessed thing to have a hope that no bullet or cannon-ball can touch, and a life indestructible and immortal. Then turning to the colonel, he said, 'And now, colonel, just tell Uncle John how it is with you. We are all perishing creatures, and must soon be in eternity together. Have you, dear colonel, a good hope in Christ? Can you say that you *know* that your Redeemer liveth? You will pardon Uncle John for asking you; he's a poor dying old man that loves your soul, and wants it to be saved.' This appeal, made rapidly, without any apparent premeditation, and with great tact and tenderness, evidently affected the colonel. Uncle John proceeded in the same manner as before: 'You know what I mean. I don't mean, Are you a professor of religion? for there are many unworthy professors; but, has your heart been renewed by grace divine? That is the point. Have you become a new creature in Christ Jesus? Have you experienced that change of which our Saviour speaks when he declares that a man must be born again before he can see the kingdom of God?' The colonel expressed a hope that he was a Christian; and Brother Vassar replied that he rejoiced to hear him say so; that he prayed the Lord to bless him and make him faithful to the end; and that he wished before God that all our leaders were earnest, believing men.

"During the revival in the winter he frequently moved the audiences in the log chapel with short but thrilling strains of extemporaneous eloquence. Those of us, who were accustomed to notice mental methods, could not but wonder at the man's gifts. For myself, I listened to passages in his oratory such as, I think, are seldom heard from either pulpit or rostrum. His style at times reminded one of the more serious and moving utterances of Gough. But his discourses showed more argument than is commonly attempted in those of that interesting lecturer. Thought after thought was presented and illustrated with admirable though untaught adherence to the rules of art. The logical order of the ideas, their progressive continuity of impulse, their practical development and application, were faultless. Homely condensed language, natural and striking metaphors, unexpected similes, antitheses and turns of expression, a becoming gesticulation, and a voice wonderfully persuasive and rich with sympathetic feeling, engaged attention, awoke the heart's best emotions and excited new interest in the saving truths of Christianity. The sincere and humble earnestness of the man was also a chief element of his power. Not a word was uttered for oratorical effect. Every sentence manifested yearning love for souls, vivid conceptions of eternal things, and a solemn sense of the presence of God. Success too, though confidently looked for, was expected solely through the divine blessing. What wonder was it that such speaking produced results that have been visible ever since? Those who have heard him will not forget with what joyous faith he sang,

*'Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run,'*

nor how invitingly and solemnly he rendered

*'There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;'*

"During the early part of the summer he labored in the army of the James, among the colored regiments, and as might be conjectured, was very successful in arousing the lively African soldiers to the duties and attractions of religion. Nowhere were his visits more welcome, or the results of his efforts to lead men to the Saviour more apparent, than among the colored troops."

Rev. J. H. Twitchell, of the Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Hartford, Conn., who as chaplain was also thrown into such contact with him in the army, in a sermon to his people after the death of Uncle John recalls many interesting incidents. We can quote but a few.

"One evening a fellow-chaplain brought him to my tent. We had not met before. At once he burst out in such a strain of religious conversation as I had never heard. At first I was repelled. It seemed canting and extravagant. I could not believe it was genuine. But that suspicion did not last long. I soon saw that what he said, and his way of saying it, was the true utterance of the man. I cannot altogether describe the impression he made. I know that when he left I followed him out and yielded to the impulse that was strongly upon me to tell him I feared I knew but very little of what it was to be

spiritually blessed, and to ask him to pray for me. His riches convicted me of poverty. And I have heard a good many say that meeting him produced a like effect on them. There was a Unitarian chaplain amongst us who confessed that Mr. Vassar was a new exhibition of Christianity to him.

"From a merely physical point of view his achievement was prodigious. He began his day at roll-call, and was in a state of intense activity from sixteen to eighteen hours. He ate little and slept little, yet never flagged, and never gave out. Week after week, and seven days in the week, the same even high rate of energy was sustained. I suppose there were very few of the eight thousand officers and men of our division with whom in the time he was with us he did not talk, and with the majority of them more than once or twice. I used to see him *running* in his eagerness to get about. Yet he was as far as possible from being in a flurry. His restlessness was wholly external. He always knew exactly what he was after. His objects were distinctly before him.

"Conversing with from seventy-five to a hundred different men a day, he came to the fiftieth or sixtieth just as fresh in his manner, just as much interested, just as tender, as at the first. He wasted no words. He went right to the heart of his errand at once, and his bearing was such that it was hardly possible to take offence. Indeed it was said, and I think truly, that in the entire division he never met with but one positive rebuff, and that in the case of an officer in liquor. And the reason was, he was entirely self-renounced, and showed it. He repre-

sented the yearning heart of Christ. It was almost magical the power he had over men. One of our chaplains, taking him to dine with him one day, found no member of his mess present beside himself but the colonel. Now this colonel was irreligious, immoral and low-bred, and the chaplain feared to have Mr. Vassar say anything to him, and I think had advised him to that effect. For a little while the earnest man held his peace; then pausing from his eating, said, 'My dear Colonel, this is the first time I ever saw you, and perhaps we shall never meet again. I am sure you will not think it amiss if I ask you whether you have an interest in the great salvation?' The chaplain's heart leaped up into his mouth. He expected an explosion; but to his surprise the colonel answered the question as simply as it was asked, and with entire civility, and even thanked him for expressing such interest in his welfare. Dinner over, the colonel said, 'Sir, would you like to talk to the men?' Of course Uncle John said Yes, and the colonel absolutely spent half the afternoon in walking with him through the regiment, and introducing him to knots of soldiers here and there, with, 'Here's a gentleman who has something to say to you, and you had better listen to him, for I think he is a good man.' The chaplain followed them around in amazement, and could scarcely credit his senses. The colonel was not converted, but for the time he was subdued.

"And so he passed around among us for a whole season, uttering one voice continually—the voice of the invitations of divine love. It used to be said that he left the print of his knees in every company street of our

division. If this was not literally true it was essentially so.

"Such a ministry could not fail to be fruitful. Upon hundreds, probably upon thousands, of men he made his mark for eternity. Dear old man! How he loved, and how he was loved for Christ's sake! There were joy and sorrow in all hearts when he parted from us. And when, as we were met together in our log chapel the evening after he bade us good-by, one of our soldiers—a Methodist—prayed in stentorian tones, '*O Lord, we thank Thee for sending dear Uncle John Vassar to us, and may God bless him wherever he goes,*' a chorus of amens responded, and I saw the tears falling on many a rugged cheek. It is my conviction that few more gracious spirits have been given to the church of Christ in any age than he. The last day alone will reveal how much good he did.

"More than any other man whom I ever met, or ever expect to meet, Uncle John excelled in the power of free, ready, wise approach to, and entrance into, the hearts of men with personal religious messages. Herein he was no respecter of persons. Professor or non-professor, privates or officers, black or white, it mattered not to him. Enough that all were men, and his Master was the Master of all, and had sent him, John Vassar, as His servant and representative to all. Not only was he not a respecter of men, but just as little was he a respecter of times, places, or occasions, save to observe those proprieties which few better understood. But he held that all times, and all places, and all occasions were the Lord's, not less than all men, and it was never in his

purpose or practice to yield God's claims to the claims of men or devils.

"Yet I never knew that he gave to any man offence by this forwardness. He had such self-revealing, overflowing, outgushing, all-conquering good-will and Christian love, such natural freedom, heartiness, and geniality, all elevated and glorified by his deep Christian experience, and also so much of childlike simplicity along with the wise tact and address perfected by years of incessant labor, that he would have been a strange man indeed who would not have opened all the doors of his heart to Uncle John, and told the dear old saint to make himself perfectly at home, and do and say just what he pleased.

"But while all recognized in him a true friend, no one could ever make him a mere 'hail fellow, well met.' His dealings were always in the clear view of a hastening eternity and its tremendous realities. Herein he was a pattern *to* all chaplains, but certainly not a pattern *after* all."

Among the Christian officers who greatly helped him, and whom he regarded as a brother in the Lord, was General McAllister, of whom he makes frequent mention in his correspondence and reports.

This testimony General McAllister sent concerning him:

"He was a man for whom I had the highest esteem and the sincerest affection; so I gladly send this slight tribute to his worth.

"He was constantly going from regiment to regiment, from tent to tent, relieving both the temporal and spiritual

wants of the soldiers. When he had been absent for a time and returned, there was great rejoicing among officers and men that Uncle John was back.

"Upon applying at headquarters for permission to hold meetings, the answer always was, 'Go ahead. We know you are all right.'

"In his frequent visits to my tent we had many pleasant conversations about the war and the religious condition of the army, and the intense patriot, as well as intense Christian, shone out in them all.

"It was his custom before leaving always to pray with us, and in his prayer each individual present was mentioned. One of my officers who was frequently with us said, 'I can stand up under any man's prayers but Uncle John Vassar's.'

"During the winter of 1863-64 there was a great revival, and especially in the Third Corps. Meetings were held nightly, and thousands were converted. Often, not knowing that Uncle John was present, I would be surprised to hear his voice from the rear of the chapel in exhortation. Perhaps that would be the sixth meeting that he had attended that evening."

His good friend, Colonel A. B. Smith, of Poughkeepsie, then Major of the 150th New York, furnishes this sketch:

"We were visited by Uncle John several times, and he was always welcome to a part of my tent. He was unremitting in ministering to the sick and disabled. I knew him once to carry a box as large as a good-sized trunk nearly three miles on his back, filled with delicacies for our sick and suffering men. He was ubiquitous in the

army, came often, and always left his mark for the Master on every one he met. He waited for no formalities. His first remark would be, 'I hope this loyal blue covers a heart loyal to the Lord Jesus. He is the best friend a soldier can have. Tell me, is He your friend? Come over to the prayer-meeting to-night.'

"On Sunday, the 9th day of August, 1863, we were at Kelly's Ford, and Uncle John came to us and said, 'Shall we not have a little prayer-meeting to-night about sundown between the 150th New York and 13th New Jersey regiments?' It was agreed upon. He was the only man in citizen's clothes in all the Twelfth Corps. All our chaplains were away sick or in hospitals, and a hundred or two gathered at the appointed time. We sat around or kneeled upon the ground, and Uncle John prayed as he only could pray. The meeting was going pleasantly on when a soldier from General Ruger's headquarters stepped into the circle, and touching Uncle John, said, 'The general wants you.' Not the least confused, he said, 'Boys, go right on; the general wants to see me,' and he marched at the side of the soldier a prisoner over to the headquarters of the brigade twenty rods or more away. He was there accosted with the rough inquiry, 'Who are you, and what are you here for? You are not the chaplain of either of those regiments. We shot a man as a spy who came into our camp as you have come to-day. By whose authority are you here?' 'Oh, I know the whole of the 150th Regiment,' said Uncle John. 'I am an agent of the American Tract Society, and have a pass through the whole army of the Potomac from General Patrick and President Lincoln.

And now, General, do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? We can have a little season of prayer right here.' 'No, no,' said General Ruger. 'Here, orderly, take this man back, and I will see Colonel Ketcham about him.' So Uncle John was back before the meeting ended, and it proved one of the best meetings I ever attended in the army.

"On the resignation of our chaplain, Rev. T. E. Vassar, his Uncle John was unanimously elected to fill the vacancy. Army regulations, however, required that a chaplain should be an ordained minister, which he was not. A strong letter from the officers of the regiment was sent to his church at Poughkeepsie, urging them to call a council for Uncle John's ordination, he having been licensed as a preacher some time before. He went home to take counsel touching the step, and found his church fully ready to proceed. Some outside parties, however—and some who ought to have been the last to whisper it—hinted to him that he was looking to the chaplaincy from sordid motives, the desire for paltry pelf. That settled the question. Of all men he was the last to deserve a thrust like that. If ever there lived an utterly unselfish soul it was he. But he would not put himself where his influence might be injured by such an imputation. Back he went to his old work at twenty-five dollars a month, instead of a chaplain's hundred and twenty-five, the same loving, busy, devoted soul that he was before. Our Twelfth Corps was then sent to the West and Southwest to follow Sherman to the sea, and we never had Uncle John with us again. He sent us, however, occa-

sional letters still, and among those who survive and remember those days his memory is sweet.

"I have known the man since 1851, and only to love and almost adore him as the most perfect exemplifier of Christ whom I ever knew. He was one of God's own noblemen. Disciplined, tried, purified, he shone like burnished gold. Often I heard unbelieving officers say that if they could have a religion such as his they would prize it above all price. What he suffered and endured in serving Christ and his fellow-men, and what the grand results, the eternal day must be left to tell."

But it is time we let the intrepid toiler tell us a little concerning his work, and tell it in his own words. There are letters and reports in his handwriting which would fill a volume such as this touching the labors of these days.

When in the autumn of 1863 the advance on the Rappahannock was made, he says:

"We followed the poor boys out part of the way to the Rappahannock, and as they cried, 'Good-by, Uncle John,' the big tears rolled down many of their cheeks. We felt deeply for them, and soon the roar of cannon told us they had met the enemy in mortal combat. In the morning ambulances of wounded men came in calling for food and nursing. We joined the Christian Commission in its labor of love for two days, and passed through many affecting scenes."

A month later he is back at Alexandria in the "Soldiers' Rest," and thence he writes: "I have helped in two meetings a night for some time. The attendance is large, and

many are serious, while a few have confessed Christ."

Another writes: "Last evening we heard from several converts in Battery H. It was worth all my labor here to listen to the story of what grace had done for them. At the Soldiers' Rest one fine young man cried out, 'O that God would have mercy on me. My mother died but a few days since, and begged me to meet her in heaven.' Another told me that he had left home to get rid of his mother's entreaties and prayers, but the Spirit had followed him and rung them in his ears. He has had a hard struggle, but I believe has submitted his heart to Christ."

Later in the winter he is down among the huts and tents of the Third Army Corps.

Rejoicingly he reports to the rooms in New York marvels of saving grace. "I have never seen such a work since coming out. There are crowded meetings every night. Christians are all aroused. Converts are being multiplied. In the spring the entire command will move, and many of these will go out to die on the bloody field."

A chaplain at the same date writes to the Society: "We are greatly indebted to you for sending Uncle John here. We wish he could have remained all winter. When he bade us good-by it was with prayers and tears that reminded me of the elders parting with Paul at Miletus. He went away with his knees all ragged, like a scarred veteran."

He runs home for a few days, and on getting back to Washington finds that he cannot get at once inside our lines on account of some new orders which have just been given. No time must be lost, so he goes to work among

the troops around the capital. We can imagine how he would enjoy a service such as this: "Sunday afternoon General Briggs, who has charge of all volunteers passing through here to the front, went with me to a meeting in a Pennsylvania regiment, where we had present a thousand officers and men. I wish you could have seen the General as he faced these men, and heard the words he pressed upon their hearts. I have not met such another Christian officer excepting General McAllister. Old Massachusetts may well be proud of such a son. He is a tower of strength to Christian laborers here."

After the terrible battles in the "Wilderness" he went down to Fredericksburg, where the wounded had been brought in, and thence he writes: "I am surrounded by the dying and the dead. From morning to night, and often through the night, I am called to aid temporally or spiritually those who are nearing eternity. I have not passed by the poor rebel soldiers. Some of them were very grateful for little kindnesses shown.

"I have been detailed with several others to nurse and care for some five hundred of our wounded men. Many of them know me, and a number, when undergoing amputation, would beg me to come and stand by their sides. Thank God for our holy religion. In the midst of so much suffering I see some great triumphs of grace."

Next he is with General Butler's army at Point of Rocks, ministering to those in the convalescent camps injured in the attack on Petersburg, and this is the story that he tells: "I cannot describe what my eyes have seen, my ears heard, and my heart felt these ten days past;

feeding men whose mouths have been torn by bullets, or whose throats so injured that they could hardly take nourishment sufficient to sustain life, distributing the stores of the Sanitary and Christian Commissions, praying with the dying, relieving men who for six weeks have been over the suffering or burying the dead—this has been my work.”

From before Petersburg, where the Sanitary Commission finds in him a valued helper and puts large supplies at his disposal, he reports: “The firing is almost continuous along portions of our line. Many of the dear converts of last winter are falling, and are being laid to their long rest. One of them I had looked to as chosen of God for great good. Talented and generous, courageous, yet childlike. I have not often met his like. I saw him after he had fallen, the stars and stripes yet in his hands. His face was as radiant as when we last sang with him his favorite hymn, ‘There is an hour of peaceful rest.’

“Another dear spirit was cut down in a recent charge. I saw him after the amputation of his leg, and before he died. He seemed calm, cheerful, and full of delight in Christ. Speaking of his part in the engagement, he said, ‘I did all I could.’ These and many others are buried close up to the enemy’s lines, but the loving Jesus watches over them as though they slept in the old family burial ground.

“One of the converts, after the explosion of the mine, came out badly hurt. He was placed among the wounded, and when I reached him he lifted up the stump of a

missing limb and cried, 'Uncle John, I have lost my arm, but I have not lost my hold on Jesus.' "

Nothing could be more conclusive as to the soundness of his work than such a testimony.

At City Point, amid the trenches, he was completely prostrated, and lay for days very ill. Ex-Mayor Fay, of Chelsea, Mass., took him to his tent and showed him such attention as a brother might. By Thanksgiving (1864) he is able to work again, and thus mentions the observance of that day: "We had religious services in all the forts and trenches, and at the hospitals and headquarters.

"Several more good boys belonging to our Christian brotherhood are gone. Sergeant L—— was brought in dead while I was standing in the fort. A ball passed through his body. He never even groaned. When they picked him up Chaplain H—— told him to look to Jesus. He looked up, and calmly said, 'Jesus is with me now. God's will be done.' "

On the first Sabbath in February, 1865, he writes from Patrick's Station: "We had expected to dedicate several new log chapels and have some very interesting services to-day, but as we were getting ready the men were suddenly ordered to move to the left. For the last half hour the roar of cannon has been very hard. Some of the men who were so happy in our meeting last night, and who went out so cheerfully this morning, have been brought in dead. My heart sickens as I look on the bloody ground and remember what sorrow will be brought to many a home by this day's fight."

After the battle of Hatcher's Run comes this striking

incident: "At one of the recent meetings this fact came out. In the last move a Christian young man in the camp was detailed to remain behind for some service while an impenitent tent-mate was ordered on. Anxious for the yet unsaved comrade, and fearing that the engagement might be a serious one, the pious soldier offered to change places with his chum, saying frankly that he believed he was prepared for whatever might come. The offer was accepted, and in the bloody battle that followed the friend who went was three times hit, but not seriously hurt. The impression made on the other soul was so deep as to send him at once to Christ."

Immediately on the occupation of Richmond the Tract Society sent Rev. G. L. Shearer there to take charge of its work in Virginia, and for some months Uncle John was his efficient ally in trying to repair, morally and religiously at least, the ravages of war. To a later chapter these labors properly belong.

CHAPTER VII

NEW CAMPAIGNS

THE armies of the nation vanished as suddenly as they emerged, leaving but "the blessed memory of the rights they vindicated, and the honorable scars of the wrongs which they redressed." Chaplains who had been granted leave of absence from their flocks went back to lead them as aforetime through the green pastures and beside the still waters of Gospel peace. Uncle John did not follow the disbanding regiments northward. He saw a new field for operations opening in the States which war had stripped and torn and gashed. To enter it would require great tact and grace. Sectional animosities could hardly fail to be engendered during a four years' struggle, costing the lives of half a million men—animosities lasting and bitter and deep. This incident, given by Rev. G. S. Mott, D.D., of Flemington, N. J., would probably be a fair illustration of the temper of those times:

"Soon after hostilities ceased, Uncle John was sent by the Tract Society into a certain section of Virginia to ascertain what the public feeling was with reference to the Society and its work. Among those called upon was a prominent Presbyterian clergyman, whom he met on entering the yard, or at the gate. On making known his errand the minister replied, 'Do you know what is in my

heart?' 'Of course not,' said Uncle John, 'but I hope it is good.' 'Not at all,' was the reply. 'My feeling is to kill you. I hope God gives me grace to prevent me from carrying that feeling out, but now you know just how I feel toward the North.'

"Before the interview ended the angry preacher was thoroughly melted down, but the wrathful and vindictive spirit with which he greeted a brother Christian was a sample of the disposition dominant in those days." To overcome it would require calmness, readiness, self-control, and in a sevenfold degree that charity which suffereth long and is kind.

Those who did not know the man whom we are tracing may think it almost incredible that he should have possessed these qualities. To them he has been represented as an excitable, impulsive, emotional enthusiast, rushing hither and thither all aflame; and they cannot understand how such a character could ever have been a peacemaker, how such a zealot could have poured oil on troubled waters, how one so positive and even turbulent could have dealt effectively with fractious tempers and stubborn wills. We may not pause here to harmonize these apparent incompatibilities. The two sides of an arch toward the base seem opposing columns, but up above they lock together, forming one perfect whole. Human nature often wraps up what looks like incongruities, but symmetry is the outcome still. Certain it is that John Vassar was the very incarnation of fervor; it is just as certain that under the sorest provocations he with perfect patience possessed his soul.

As was intimated in the last chapter, the Tract Society opened a depot for its publications in Richmond in May of 1865. Rev. Geo. L. Shearer, as District Secretary, was put in charge. Uncle John was to push out as opportunity might offer, organizing Sunday-schools, establishing meetings, and circulating religious reading matter to such an extent as the Society might be able to provide. The need was great and urgent.

There were difficulties in the way of a cordial intercourse with the people, and many still refused fraternal greetings, but the better minds and hearts were flowing together. There were more than a million of whites and blacks in Eastern Virginia living on plantations, and these, if reached at all by the Gospel, must be reached by colportage for some time to come. In many places they had no money. Many once wealthy were pensioners upon the Government.

This glimpse of the condition of things will show us what was now to be Uncle John's work for a season, and what was to be the character of his new campaigns.

His first communication opens thus: "Reached Richmond Saturday, and the next day went into Dr. Jeter's Sabbath-school, where the reception was warm and kind. Afternoon went among the colored people, and had a cordial welcome. Evening had a good meeting among the soldiers yet remaining here. The next Sabbath went down to Petersburg, and there heaven was brought nearer to me than for weeks before. The remembrance of the days when we lay in the trenches here, and of the prayers that went up from lips now still in death, stirred me up

to magnify the Lord. I spoke to a large gathering of colored people, and many hearts seemed touched. Eight asked prayers, and I felt that a work of grace had begun with many more.

"In the First African Church, Richmond, we had another precious and powerful meeting. More than thirty were greatly troubled, and some wept aloud. A great awakening, I believe, is near. Oh, for youthful strength and heavenly grace to labor for my dearest Lord."

The prediction was quickly verified. This First African Church, which had been for years the rendezvous or headquarters of the colored Baptists of the city, and had a membership of over three thousand, was visited by a most remarkable outpouring of saving grace. At its height the body of the house was mainly filled with inquiring souls, and frequently its nearly twenty-five hundred sittings were all occupied before the exercises of the hour began. While the interest prevailed Uncle John met the members for prayer at daybreak. Till noon he visited and prayed in their families. At twelve he went into the colored schools and spent an hour with those who were specially concerned. At four o'clock he met inquirers along with the pastor. At seven o'clock he addressed the crowds that assembled from night to night. Nearly five hundred were added to this single church.

From Richmond he pushed out into the country around, Danville, Lynchburg, and other large places engaging him for a few days each. In the midsummer of 1865 he was travelling southward in the State, and stopping at a station on the railroad, learned that in some coal mines

near there were large companies of freedmen who had no school, and for whom no one seemed to care. Such a statement was enough to interest him in their behalf. He found a planter three miles away who agreed to superintend a Sabbath-school. A little further searching, and a building was obtained in which to meet. Notice was circulated as widely as possible, and the next Lord's Day a hundred came together to be taught. He scattered among these spellers and primers, and put up a card large enough for all to see, from which he gave them their first lesson. So eagerly did the people avail themselves of the help thus proffered that the school proved a marked success at once. Inspired by it, they even started a day-school, taught by one of their own race. Out of that soon came a church; out of the teacher came a pastor, and on a subsequent visit Uncle John found a hundred converts ready to confess Christ. Is it surprising that he wrote, "I feel thankful that I was ever permitted to visit this place. I wish the friend that gave fifteen dollars to purchase the books that started that school could see it now, and into what it has grown. Surely he would praise God as we did yesterday."

Hear him again report: "Last Sabbath I visited the country near Powhatan Court-House, and established a Sunday-school in the woods. A hundred of the young and old attended, some of whom came five miles. A number of planters were present, who admitted they had never seen persons more anxious to learn. A log-house for the school will at once be built. I can get up such schools every week if you can give the cards and books. We cannot ask the colored folks to pay for them. They have

all they can do to get bread. At Dover, where I established a school a few weeks ago, I stopped on my return. Some of the scholars ran to meet me, shouting, '*Uncle John, I have learned to read a heap since you were here.*' Better still, more than fifty have turned to Christ."

With the closing days of 1866 he crosses the line into North Carolina, where black and white alike give him the kindest welcome. On Christmas day he thus reports: "I have just returned from the Moravian settlement at Salem. I made the journey of sixty miles on horseback, through more than fifty of which I did not see a single school-house. Bishop Bahnson and his brethren were very cordial. They have a grand missionary church. Their mark can be seen in all that region. Numbers are coming to Jesus. Hundreds within a few weeks have made their peace with God."

What large results may be realized from small beginnings another letter of his, written about this time, tells. "In a neighborhood of Stafford County, Virginia, where there was no Sabbath-school when I first visited it, and where I could at that time get no one to engage in the enterprise, a lady tells me how God led her husband into the work. When he went home from our meeting he told her that he had lived fifty years without Jesus, but could do so no longer. He sent for a minister to come to his house and preach. The truth was blessed to his own salvation. Fifty others soon followed in his steps. A church was organized. A meeting-house holding two hundred has been built, and I remained and organized a Sun-

day-school in it, which will have a hundred children enrolled before the summer ends."

And a little later:

"By the help of God, I would plead for the poor white and colored people of this desolated part of our country, until every Christian and friend of his country shall feel the responsibility God has rolled upon us to help them in this hour of need. What shall be the character of this population? How may we stamp the image of Christ on the hearts of thousands? These are weighty questions with me.

"I am busy every day and night among the colored people. Quite a number of our scholars in our Sunday-school have found Christ, and it is blessed to see their happy faces on Sunday morning as they make their way in haste to school. A large number are under conviction and need constant instruction. Hundreds know me, and cry, 'Uncle John, how do you do?' I am getting more and more interested in the children. I have thousands of nephews and nieces, and feel no shame as they recognize me as 'Uncle John.' All I want is to meet these thousands in the house of many mansions. Jesus will have many jewels set in dark caskets to stud his crown.

"A little beyond Oregon Hill, I passed over a large field of graves, where lay so many of the men of both armies. I thought of the many hopes buried with the bodies of the poor boys sleeping away from friends and home. My heart was touched with the remembrance of the past; but another feeling filled my bosom as I saw crowds of living forms, small and great, passing before

me as I entered the city, and I looked upon the thousands I have been mingling with. I felt impelled to lift my heart to heaven for their salvation. Oh, that the church of Christ were awake to the interests of these unnumbered souls that are ready to perish in the midst of poverty.

"Such a field as we find in Virginia is seldom looked upon by Christian men. There are thousands of colored people who need to be taught to read and to be led to look to Jesus for salvation. In their unsettled state they need God-fearing men to encourage them religiously, and teach them in temporal matters what is for their good. Thousands of the colored people thank us for our labors and our prayers, and the poorer class of whites receive us gladly when they know our object in coming among them. Could we only have the books and men to reach the different counties of this great state, God only knows the good that might be done.

"His labors here, and in his frequent visits to other parts of his field, were very arduous; but his heart was greatly cheered by the anxiety of the people to learn, and by the constant evidences of the Holy Spirit. "Two things," he says, "keep me from fainting by the way: the children learn so fast, and many are coming to Christ. Sometimes as many as fifty have united with the colored churches on a Sunday. They organize churches in the woods, and build log-houses to worship God in, and teach their children to read. Every visit to the country convinces me that we have the grandest mission field in America. In the widespread influences of the religion of

Christ, I see the only great and permanent prosperity of the South."

In 1868 he spent some time in Central and Western New York, of which we get glimpses such as these:

"There was a revival in the Brick Presbyterian Church of Rochester, and Uncle John, accompanied by one of the elders, went from house to house.

"The elder felt quite nervous at the first for fear that something might be said or done which would be out of place or in bad taste. He was afraid that Uncle John, who was a plain man and fresh from army and freedmen's work, might be out of his element in mixing with a higher social class. But after the first two or three calls every fear of this sort was dissipated. He found Uncle John was equal to any place or class. He made no blunders, and was above and beyond criticism. To him it was a wonder that this man, untutored in social etiquette or conventionalities, struck so nearly right every time. Two or three things accounted for it. He had naturally the instincts of a true gentleman. He was quick to read human nature, and he had a large amount of sanctified common-sense which never forsook him.

"I once saw him ask a man if he loved Jesus. The man was a German, and could not understand a word said. Uncle John was not to be baffled by such a fact as this. He pointed with his finger upward, and with an expression on his face that spoke more than words, he caused his German friend to comprehend his meaning.

"One day while in Rochester he happened to be in the store of one of our leading business men, and, as was his

wont, took the opportunity to speak a word on the subject of religion with those who came in. Some were evidently surprised, but none seemed offended. After Uncle John went out, a railroad conductor came in, who was rough and sometimes violent, especially if his prejudices happened to be crossed. What had been going on in the store was casually mentioned, whereupon this conductor exclaimed, 'Well, neither he nor any other man would dare try that on me. If he did he would get a piece of my mind.'

"The very next day the two men chanced to meet there. Uncle John, all ignorant of what had been said, edged around to the conductor, and presently out came the inevitable question, 'My friend, may I ask if you love Jesus?' The proprietor of the store now expected a scene. Instead of that the man only stammered out a few words of explanation or apology over the fact that he did not. When, Uncle John left, the conductor asked, 'Who was that man?' The storekeeper replied, 'Uncle John Vassar, the man I told you of yesterday.' 'Is it, indeed?' he said. 'Well, he is a good fellow any way.'"

Now he goes to minister to still another class. In the summer of 1869 the Tract Society determined to put its system of colportage in operation along the Pacific Railroad, among the mining regions of the Rocky Mountains, and up and down the country's sunset slopes. Mr. Shearer, so long in charge of the Richmond agency, was intrusted with the work, and to his assistance he called the man who had shared with him other trusts and toils.

In the cabins of Colorado miners we next find Uncle

John. It's hard material that he here comes in contact with and seeks to mould for holiness and heaven. He takes in the situation at a glance, and says, "No man of weak faith and little love can succeed here. It will take a soul of the John Knox stamp to get hold of the men who venture here for silver and gold." But, undaunted by what is unpromising, he strikes right in. Before he leaves, these adventurers and fortune-seekers are melted under the truth of God, as voiced by loving lips and energized by the Spirit's might. Hear him tell again the old story: "We had four meetings on Sunday, and I have not seen more tears shed for a long time. Strong men broke down as they were plead with, or while prayer was being offered in their behalf. A few very devout souls are to be found here, and I have enjoyed a rich feast of love with them."

He finds a little English lad in the boarding house who has recently given his heart to Christ, and he sets him to work distributing religious reading, and begs the brethren at the rooms on Nassau Street to send the young disciple longing to be useful twenty copies of the *Messenger* monthly to circulate.

At Virginia City, Sacramento, and at Stockton he labors for a few days with different pastors, and Mr. Shearer reports that this wayside sowing everywhere bears fruit.

In the first-named town on Sunday afternoon he exhorted in front of a noted gambling saloon. "The attendance was large and the attention good. Some at the close returned to their games disappointed that with such a crowd there could not have been so much as a dog fight; others wondered where the margin for profit could be,

inasmuch as both the talking and the tracts were free; but in many ears the familiar, yet long-forgotten, words of entreaty, invitation, and warning came with an almost melting power."

In San Francisco an agency of the Society is established, and some stirring meetings held there, as well as at Oakland and other towns in the interior, or up and down the coast. The Chinese, that now vexing factor in the national problem, were then beginning to crowd over to our Pacific slope, and they greatly interested Uncle John. With one or two who had recently been converted he had protracted and pleasant interviews, for every redeemed soul his heart went out to as a brother's, whatever the nationality or name.

These in brief were the engagements and undertakings of what we have called his new campaigns. The freedmen, the poor whites of the South, the miners of Nevada and Colorado and California, the Mormons of Utah, the new settlers on the plains of Kansas and along her streams, the hardy mountaineers of Kentucky and East Tennessee—all were plied with whatsoever Gospel truth could awe or win, attract or alarm, and upborne on the strong arms of wrestling prayer.

The variety of incident entering into years of such service eventually becomes thin and dreamy. It fades out of sight as the shore does to the receding voyager. Standing on the vessel's deck as it leaves port, the passenger sees object after object disappear, till finally even high-topped hills and the light-house on the rock are no longer visible. Time and its experiences so sink away. Occurrences

which impressed us deeply at the first cease to be remembered as we travel on and they are left farther off. If a tithe of what Uncle John has told us about the days just reviewed could be recalled and repeated here it would be of thrilling interest. Much of it would make the eye moisten and the heart glow. If forgotten by us, however, all these details and circumstances God remembers, and keeps them working in the wide scheme of an unsleeping providence toward the foreseen and foretold dominion of His Son. How vast may be the range of a blessing dropping first in a negro hut or a prairie cabin! Who can calculate the final issues of an influence for good starting on its line of march with a tract left at a door, or a prayer offered within? Who can limit the effect of an interview like this which we have heard Uncle John describe? We think it happened during his earlier labors in the West.

In one house that was entered the praying wife of an infidel husband begged that a Bible might be given her, as there had been none in the home during all their married life. One was furnished her, and the missionary went his way. Hardly had he gone out of sight when the husband came in, and instantly his eye lit upon the book. One glance aroused all his rage. Seizing the volume with one hand, and his axe with the other, he hurried out to the wood-pile, and laying it on the chopping-block, he cut it through and through. Coming back to the cabin with the two pieces, he hurled one toward the wife, saying in a mocking tone, "As you claim a part of all the property around here, there is your share of this." The other half was pitched up into a niche where tools were sometimes

kept. Months passed. The timid wife could only pray. One wet or wintry day, when the man was indoors, with little to do, finding the time hang heavy, he looked around for something to read. Reading matter in that home was scarce. While rummaging around in this nook in search of some old newspaper, what should turn up but his half of the mutilated book. To while away the monotony of the hour he took it up. Was it by accident that he opened at the parable of the prodigal? He did not remember having seen it before. By its simplicity he was charmed. Presently the narrative was broken off. To finish it he must have the missing piece. Unwilling to ask for it, and so acknowledge that even his curiosity was stirred, he cast stealthy glances here and there to see if it would not appear. But its wary owner had safely hidden her fragment of Scripture, and his hunt was vain. Pretty soon inquisitiveness conquered pride, and at his request the wife produced her piece. The story was finished. It was read over again and again. Need the outcome of the whole be told? Another wanderer fell at the Father's feet. Another penitent was folded in the Father's arms. Another bitter opposer became the champion of a faith which all his life he had labored to destroy.

A friend sends the following narrative as related to him by Uncle John, which illustrates his habit as well as his success in following up a case.

"It was a great thing—one of the richest treats, to hear him relate the history of cases out of the journal of his experiences. No tale of adventure was ever more fascinating than these accounts as he gave them. I have

known a tentful of army officers, most of them ungodly men, listen to him a whole evening with the most absorbed attention while he described conversions that took place going on twenty years before. It is hardly necessary to say that under such circumstances his story-telling was always preaching in disguise. His style was all his own; he was an exceedingly rapid talker, full of life and action, and it would be impossible to reproduce his narrations of this sort. But one that I remember ran somewhat thus:

“There was a man in —— county, a Mr. R——, who lived away from everybody in a log-house; I never shall forget the time I had with him. Oh, how he *did* hate to repent! But he had to at last. Grace was too much for him. And then he had an excellent Christian wife, as so many men have. That helped a good deal. He was fond of his wife, and sometimes he overheard her praying. He knew how she felt about it. I suppose I saw that man twenty times. Sometimes he was good-natured and sometimes he was not. How mad he would be once in a while, just because I said a friendly word to him about his soul! You see, he was not at ease in his sins. Men never are. They try to be and pretend to be, but they are not. They cannot be. The impenitent sinner is not happy. This man used to be very angry sometimes. But he never struck me. He came pretty near it once or twice, and I thought he was going to, but he did not. It was after I had known him a good while, that one day when I had gone out into the lot where he was at work to find him, he dropped his hoe and came at me fierce as a lion, cursing and swearing.

I stood still and he stopped, and we stood and looked at each other. Finally I said, 'O Mr. R——, you will never have any peace till you give your heart to God!' and I know that I spoke kindly, for I felt just like crying, I was so sorry for him. But it seemed to make him only angrier still. He fairly foamed at the mouth, and, shouting at the top of his voice, he told me to leave and never let him see my face again, or he would kill me. I did not answer a word, and walked quietly away; but I felt pretty sure that the end was near, and that he could not hold out much longer. The next time I came that way, as I approached his house, I thought I saw him slip around the corner of the house and make for the barn, like a person trying to get out of sight. I went to the door and asked his wife where he was. 'Oh, my poor husband!' she said, and the tears came into her eyes. 'Have courage,' I said; 'I believe the Lord will find him this day. Where is he?' 'He told me not to tell you where he was,' she replied. 'He saw you coming and went out to get away from you, but—but—I think he went toward the barn.'

"'Now, dear sister,' said I, 'you stay here and pray, and I will go and try to find him.' I went out to the barn. I knew that his proud heart must be giving way, else he would not have avoided me so. I tried one of the barn doors. It was fastened. I knocked. No answer. It was as still as the grave inside. 'O Mr. R——,' I cried, 'let me in, *do* let me in! I'm nobody but a poor sinner saved by grace, and the same grace will save you, if you will only let it! Let me in for Christ's sake; please do!' Then I passed around to another door and found that fastened,

too, and knocked there, and again I begged him to let me in.

"At last, when I began to be afraid I must give him up for that time, as I listened, I heard a sigh and a step; then more steps coming toward me. I heard him unlocking the door. I did not know what was going to happen next. The door opened slowly, and there he stood. You needed to look but once to see that the Lord had won the fight. His face was pale, but there was no anger in it. He tried to speak but he could not. I went right up to him and took him by the hand, and said, 'O my dear Mr. R——, let us kneel down and thank God together;' and so we did. There were a good many more tears in that prayer than words. 'Now,' said he, as soon as he could control his voice, 'let us go in and see my wife.' I tell you the two minutes it took us to go from the barn to the house were the happiest two minutes he had ever seen. And you ought to have seen that woman's face when she saw us coming in together! She knew what it meant. Besides, a single glance at him was enough. It seems to me I never saw so happy a woman in my life.'

"Uncle John accepted fully Rutherford's exhortation: 'Take as many with you to heaven as you are able to draw; the more you draw with you, you shall be the welcomer yourself.'"

We are brought now down to 1871. Uncle John has seven years remaining in which to war the good warfare. It will be carried on in what might be called "the Department of the East."

CHAPTER VIII

ALL ALONG THE LINES

IF there is any one part of our country which more than another might seem to have little use for such a man as Uncle John it is the New England States. Settled by men characterized to a pre-eminent degree by regard for religious things, populated still chiefly by their descendants, studded with churches whose pulpits are occupied by preachers inferior in ability and devotedness to no others in the land, blessed with revivals reaching wide and deep, it would look as though these ancient Christian commonwealths would have little work for a colporteur anywhere within their bounds.

It is a fact, however, that old-established churches, and communities long leavened by gospel truth, sometimes need to have their decorous and conventional ways broken in upon as the smooth religious life of eighteen hundred years ago was broken in upon by "the voice of one crying in the wilderness."

There is such a tendency to get into ruts of creed and conduct, and go jogging monotonously along them, that every now and then something needs to occur that shall start us out of them, and make religion seem an awfully earnest thing. Hence it was that Uncle John was invited to labor in strong churches of Massachusetts and Connecti-

cut, the history of some of which runs almost back to the coming of the Mayflower, as well as amid their rural neighborhoods in which, on account of removals westward or the concentration of population in the manufacturing towns, gospel influence had to some extent declined. In these States he spent a large part of his last half dozen years; but as Maine, Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey shared his labors during that period to some extent, we attach to these scattered operations the captain, ALL ALONG THE LINES.

Christian brethren in the various communities thus visited send accounts more or less complete of the way God wrought through him and by him to arouse and save.

Rev. I. C. Meserve, of New Haven, Conn.: "I had just entered upon my ministry when I first saw him. He came to my study to see me, and at first I thought him some harmless but decidedly crazy man. In less than an hour, however, the truth broke in upon me that a Christian was in my house of a type hitherto unknown. He stayed a few days with me and we then formed a friendship which death has not severed and which I count one of the richest treasures of my life.

"Two or three incidents occurred that most admirably illustrate his spirit and his methods. This as showing the temper with which he met rebuff. One day we met a prominent church member. I introduced them, and the conversation was not long in reaching the plainly but kindly put question, 'Are you a child of God, and how is it with you?' The angry and unexpected answer was, 'I don't answer any such questions. I don't do business that

way, sir.' Uncle John took no offence, but simply explained that as a member of the Lord's kingdom he wished to communicate in the language of that kingdom with any fellow-member whom he met.

"We passed on and soon saw a man approaching who was not a believer in a personal devil. I so informed Uncle John, who, on being introduced, went on to state that he was a colporteur of the American Tract Society, travelling over the country fighting the devil; 'And do you know, brother, I find some people who don't believe there is any devil; but you and I know that these are his greatest dupes.' It was a master stroke of policy and tact and skill.

"I saw him with an old man of more than eighty who had resisted gospel influences all his life, and apparently was totally unconcerned. In ten minutes his indifference melted, and with flowing tears he confessed his need of Christ. I watched that encounter with intense interest, for it was like a duel of wit and argument, and discerned that the rarest powers in soul-searching were possessed by Uncle John.

"For three successive winters he helped me when I was pastor of the little church in State street, Brooklyn, N. Y., and under God I believe he saved it from disbanding in despair. Such praying and pleading in public and private—my heart grows hot with the memory of it.

"I saw him on his knees one day in our lecture-room at the close of Sunday-school, pleading for the children, some of whom were gathered around. I watched to note the effect of the prayer. Presently a boy a dozen or more

years old dropped on his knees, then he crawled under Uncle John's uplifted arm, and finally threw himself sobbing upon that broad breast, as true a Christian from that hour forward as I ever met. Others followed, and the dear old man was presently surrounded by a group who were led to the very foot of the cross by that prayer. And it was not undue excitement either. I want to bear witness to the fact that those who were converted under his labors were as reliable in their after lives as any Christians whom I have known. The lad spoken of became a power in the church, and in his own home too.

"And I want to speak here of a prayer-meeting in my own house one night, in which I came nearer realizing heaven upon earth than ever before or since. We had been having a blessed time at the church that night, and from it came back—my wife, my brother (then preparing for the ministry), and myself. After a few minutes' conversation Uncle John suggested a season of prayer together before going to the night's rest. The memory of those next minutes will only fade with life. With melted hearts and streaming eyes by way of Calvary we drew near our Lord. Uncle John seemed to me that night like a guide who knew every inch of the road and took us right into the secret place of the Most High.

"After I came to New Haven to take charge of the Davenport Church, he labored with me between two and three weeks. The number of converts was large, but the impetus given to the spiritual life of the church, and especially the type which its character took on was so marked that its progress has been wonderful. Hundreds

have been attracted to it, and I am confident that it was largely because of Uncle John that these blessed results came.

"Of one more fact let me tell. He went by invitation several winters ago to one of our Connecticut towns, and was met by a spirit of decided opposition. Some threatened to personally maltreat him if he ventured into their homes. So wonderfully, however, did God work that in a few days he was in those very houses, and greeted with a 'Come in, Uncle John, we have been waiting and wanting to see you here.' The witnesses of his power over the minds and consciences and hearts of men are numbered by thousands in New England, and all because he was, as much as any prophet of old, 'a man of God.'"

Rev. Mr. Zabriskie furnishes the following graphic sketch:

"One afternoon, in the summer of 1872, I received a call at my parsonage at Old Saybrook, Conn. I did not catch the name of my visitor so as to recognize it, and on entering the reception room I looked with some suspicion on the travel stained man whom I found waiting there. I received so many itinerants of various degrees of dubiousness, that I had come to throw the burden of proof on them in the establishment of their genuineness and respectability. But by and by as it dawned on me that this was Uncle John Vassar, the modern successor, if not of the apostles, yet of the 'seventy,' and the latchets of whose dusty shoes I was not worthy to stoop down and unloose, there was a sudden and decided revolution in my mental attitude and reception. He had been laboring

with Dr. Goodell, then of New Britain, and elsewhere in that region, and was passing through Saybrook to take the night-boat to New York, and having a little time to spare he as usual paid his respects to the minister to inquire concerning the spiritual condition of the place. When he left it was with the promise that if the Tract Society would so arrange it he would come and work with me. I directed him to the boat, but hardly had I closed the door than it occurred to me that I had not shown him the attention belonging to the courier of the King, and that I ought to see him further on his way. Hastily donning my out-door attire, I started after and overtook him about half way to the wharf, which was something like a mile away.

"My heart burned within me while we talked together on the road. I took occasion to introduce him to several whom I met, even stopping two or three wagons for the purpose. To everyone he gave a word in season, and most of them wore a puzzled look at this Philip starting up beside their chariots among the desert sandheaps of Saybrook Point. As some time would elapse before the boat would sail, I left him at the Point and returned home. But these waiting hours were not wasted ones, for not a few laborers and loungers heard the Gospel from his lips even there.

"He was detailed by the Society to work in Saybrook, and made his first appearance in our church on Sabbath morning, November 10th. After the sermon he arose in the midst of the congregation to say a few words by way of greeting and preparation for what he was there

to undertake. His movement was so unexpected and so unprecedented in that staid old community, his appearance so plain, his speech so searching, that the general impression was unfavorable. Many afterwards confessed that it took them a long while to get over their prejudice. Possibly the time and mode were not well chosen. Mr. Vassar always contended that he was best adapted to personal effort. But the real 'offence' was that he spoke to Christian professors in such an uncompromising way about their duty, and in such a startling way about their state, that every one whose heart was not honest with itself, or whose peace was a false one, was sure to be stung and irritated.

"As he went through the town I was greatly interested to observe his progress as a kind of touch-stone. He was a veritable sword of the Spirit, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart and laying bare its secret. The 'poor in spirit' were sure to be revealed. I think he could hardly have encountered more odium and opposition anywhere, especially among the members of the churches. Many of my own people regarded him with great disfavor. The part of the town which had once been the source and centre of revival work, but which had fallen into formalism and routine, was the part in which he found least sympathy and encouragement. Those parts, on the contrary, which were regarded as the most hopeless and God-forsaken, were those where he was most welcome and successful. The poor and prodigal felt the beatings of his great heart as seeker for souls. The most unexpected people in every rank of life 'took'

to him, and there were equally unexpected cases of revulsion or dislike. I said that his first public appearance in Saybrook was November 10th. Really it was on the 9th, for on that evening, at his request, I rallied a little group in my parlor to pray. These brethren were completely won to him and to the work. Had there been time to gather a larger number that night, his sudden apparition in the guise of an Elijah in our decorous church the next day might have produced a different effect.

"On Sunday afternoon and evening Mr. Vassar attended all the Sunday-schools and prayer-meetings he could reach. During the week he attended and addressed the district schools. One young man who was teaching declared that he would not allow it, but the old veteran stormed the castle and took possession. He was a big child everywhere, and could sway and win a group of children at his will.

"On Monday morning he started out, with his districts and families all designated, and began to buttonhole every one he met with the characteristic question, 'Are you sure that you have been born again?' As I was able I went with him. Some remarkable scenes took place. We saw a young man chopping wood in his back-yard. We stepped across the road and Uncle John plied him with sword thrusts. The effect was such that he felt prayer was needed, and there by the fence, the youth on one side and we on the other, we took off our hats and prayed. The young man was one of the converts soon.

"At a store we found another young man alone. He found himself cornered, and submitted to the interview

with an ill grace, and a sort of dazed look; but he, too, quickly came to regard that interview with a very different mind.

"At another place—the post-office I think it was—a group was assembled around the stove. He there knelt and prayed and called on me to follow. The town was soon in a blaze over it, and not all of fire from above.

"We had a season of great quickening and many were converted to the Lord. I regard this work, however, as chiefly valuable for its preparatory, and I might almost say revolutionary, effect. That fallow soil needed just such a subsoil plow, and I had calculated on it when I engaged him to come. It was a hard fight, but the question was settled. The whole theory of religion and policy of work were changed from routine to revivalism, and the fruits have been ripening and been gathered ever since.

"Perhaps I ought to add one incident showing that Uncle John was capable not only of heroic treatment, but of righteous indignation where the circumstances of the case required it. At a house where we had been holding a neighborhood prayer-meeting one night a man was visiting who was a stranger to us all. As he was one who remained at the close of the service Uncle John approached him with his tender earnestness and searching questions. But the man in a dogged and discourteous way opposed a flat denial to every statement made, especially those touching his accountability and danger. I shall never forget the change which came over Uncle John's manner. He rose to a Sinaitic attitude above the wretched caviller, and his captious and blasphemous speech, as if

for the moment he was wielding the divine thunderbolts, then suddenly softening into an almost equally awful tenderness he fairly dragged him to the mercy-seat, and called on us to pray. Whether the fellow was savingly affected or not I cannot tell, as he left the place the following day, but he was morally cowed that night, and crouched speechless before Uncle John.

"I have been privileged to labor with him and to know of his labors in all parts of our country, and I never knew any one of such absolute singleness of aim. I confess that, above all men, he has been to me an inspiration, an evidence of Christianity, and an instructor in direct, personal, and practical work in saving souls. My eyes are moist with tender sorrow, as I write. But I am glad that this worn-out veteran of Christ, whose body was literally a living sacrifice for thirty years, has been mustered out. How sweetly his weather-beaten, toil-worn body sleeps and rests. How joyfully has his spirit opened its eyes upon Him "whom not having seen he loved." And how great the works which follow him none may know till the resurrection.

"Whenever we met he took me in his arms as a father would a son. He once took me in his arms before a depot full of people. I happened to be at the station to meet a train, and whom should I see devouring a hasty lunch but Uncle John. I hailed him. With fork and sandwich in mid-air he responded and gave me a hug, and then began with rapid inquiries about the work in Saybrook, and statements concerning his recent labors elsewhere. He forgot all about his lunch, and it was with

difficulty I could prevent his being left behind by the train. He had to give me one more hug after the cars began to move, so that he barely scrambled with my help upon the platform at imminent risk of his life. And there he stood nodding and gesticulating till out of sight. He was not only one of the most holy and consecrated of men, but one of the most original and attractive."

Rev. J. W. Tuck, of Middletown, Conn., tells of labor at Jewett City, in the same State, in connection with the Congregational church there.

"He came to my house on Saturday evening, November 29th, 1873. The way had been measurably prepared among us by an increased number of meetings, and a prevalent expectation of coming good. The next day he listened to the usual preaching in the morning, and in the afternoon the order of the service was left chiefly in his hands. After the reading of a few verses from the sixtieth chapter of Isaiah and brief comments thereon by the pastor, he came forward and in earnest words falling from lips touched as with a living coal addressed the church for thirty minutes, exhorting them to let their light shine and live above the world. He then proposed that they should publicly renew their covenant vows by coming out into seats which he indicated. The request at first seemed injudicious. The congregation was a most conservative one, the proposition was unexpected, and the man who made it was almost unknown. There was a moment of painful suspense, a silence that could almost be felt. Then a pew door near the front swung open, and one family walked out and complied with the request.

Another and another followed until the desired separation was complete; then to both parts of his audience were addressed other ringing words, and so the first meeting closed with tokens of good. In the evening a large assembly met in our conference room. The meeting was remarkable for its solemnity, but no new demonstrations on the part of saint or sinner were proposed. The next night there were greater numbers still, and a deeper interest could be read on every face. It was at this time that many of the new gospel songs began among my people to be introduced. Uncle John was a sweet singer in Israel, and those pieces known as 'Wondrous Love,' 'Sweet By and By,' 'Whiter than Snow,' and many like them he rang out with marvellous effect, and they will be associated with his name and work for a long time to come by the hundreds who first heard them from his lips.

"On this second evening five rose for prayer. The next night fifteen thus responded to the invitation, and now the revival broadened and deepened, overcoming opposition, or holding it in check, till scores had been converted to Christ.

"The special meetings continued only two weeks though they were kept up partially all the winter, but forty were added to our membership and the whole body lifted up to a high plane of Christian life.

"The name of Uncle John to the young people of my former charge—and I might say to the elders also—is to this day an inspiration, and his memory is a sweet savor never to be lost."

In the course of his evangelistic labors he entered the

town of Otis, in Western Massachusetts, and what happened there let Rev. O. L. Leonard, who spent a week with him on that ground, tell.

"It was a cold dark time spiritually when Uncle John arrived. The pastor was feeling much disheartened, and said to him, 'The place is dead, the church is dead, we are all dead; if you can do anything to help us, do it.' Uncle John went out and began to visit. It was right in the heat of summer, and the people, who were mostly farmers, were busy in the fields. 'No time for a revival now;' that was what they said right to his face.

"He believed that the dry bones could live. The church was opened. It was soon filled. Soon the old cry began to be heard, 'What shall I do to be saved?' and the town was shaken by the mighty power of God. About fifty souls were converted in that farming region right in the heat of summer."

Another who was led to Christ during these meetings reports them more at length.

"For many days after coming to Otis Centre, Uncle John saw almost no result from the efforts put forth. Even his courage seemed somewhat shaken, but not enough to make him let go or even relax endeavor. And presently the blessing came like the rush of many waters. The writer well remembers the evening when the first token of giving way appeared. The meeting had been more constrained than usual, and Uncle John was perceptibly cast down. Before it closed one arose and requested prayers. The effect was electrical. From that point concern took the place of apathy, and salvation moved right on. The

whole town was shaken, and ultimately the towns around. It was spoken of by the religious press as the midsummer revival, and the scene of the farmers working in the hay field all day and attending the meeting at evening day after day certainly was wonderful.

"The tact of Uncle John seemed almost supernatural. Many instances of his unerring judgment in approaching people might be given, but two or three must suffice. One man had arranged for an argument with Uncle John if he should be addressed, which he felt sure would settle the whole case. Uncle John gave him no chance to speak. He came up all smiling, invited the man to meeting, told him he knew his duty, and before an answer could be given was off. The man began to think, and was led to Christ.

"Another had arranged for a ridiculous scene if Uncle John came. He did not go near the man, and this unlooked-for way of disconcerting the carefully laid scheme set reflection working, and this man and his wife both turned to the Lord.

"All too soon came the time for him to leave our vicinity, but his influence remained, and for a long time yet his name will be revered in Otis, and his memory be a power."

From North Blandford, where he wrought the following summer, these reminiscences come.

"I was at work in my garden in the summer of 1875, when I observed an odd little man walking rapidly toward the parsonage, and thinking him to be some book agent I continued my work. As he came up he said in a pleasant voice, 'Watchman, what of the night?' I replied, 'Glory

to God, the morning cometh.' He extended to me his hand, and I knew John Vassar. He was taken at once into the parsonage and quickly into all our hearts.

"The work contemplated during the few days he could remain was fully discussed; and here he exhibited that trait of Christian character which was everywhere so manifest, his humility. He began his labors with me Sunday, July 18th. It was a pleasant day, and many came to hear the strange man of whom so much had been said. He read the first psalm and gave a beautiful exposition of it, showing how mighty he was in the Word of God. All through the week services were kept up and the awakening was great. Those who never came to the sanctuary were hunted to their hiding places and led out. Stumbling blocks that seemed in the way were removed, and though his stay was short he prepared the way for the rich revival that followed. In our community he was emphatically a John the Baptist, sent to prepare the way of the Lord."

Of these labors in Western Massachusetts Rev. George L. Ruberg, then a pastor in that section, also gives a report. "Uncle John's introduction to this part of the State was through the kindly interest of Homer Merriam, Esq., of Springfield, who was so deeply concerned about the low state of religion prevailing that he felt constrained to assume the expense of evangelical labor for the field. Arrangements were made for Uncle John to visit Otis in May, 1874. A series of meetings were held in the Congregational Church, and many of the leading citizens of the village and surrounding community were led to Christ.

"During the work the hotel was even opened for prayer-meetings, and the power of God was most graciously displayed.

"So manifest was the good accomplished that Mr. Merriam determined to send Uncle John on a summer campaign amid the Berkshire Hills; so after leaving Otis, Sandisfield secured his services for a week. In this town there had not been for a long time any general revival of religion, and there was not in any of the churches a resident male member under thirty years of age, though we had a larger number of young men living there than in any town around.

"Uncle John's visit here had been but briefly announced, yet the church at Montville village was ready to receive him. I went with my own carriage to meet him, and found him out calling still, so anxious was he to improve even the last moment of his stay. Hardly had we finished dinner before he said, 'Are there no places we can visit yet this afternoon?' The inquiry impressed me, for it was now three o'clock or later, and I had expected he would want to rest so as to be ready for the meeting at night. We immediately started out. Our first call was at the post-office. Found two persons beside the postmaster in. One was a Christian, and the others were not. All were tenderly addressed; then with his hand resting on the counter and standing he offered a short but most fervent prayer. I shall never forget that scene, and what subsequently occurred.

"One lady on whom we called was considered a woman of devout piety. In answer to the question, 'Do you love

Jesus?' she said, rather despondently, 'Not half so well as I ought.' 'Dear sister,' said Uncle John, 'I wish you would tell me how I can love Him more!'

"From the first day of his coming the revival went steadily on. Although for a farming community it was the busiest season of the year, none tried to excuse themselves from being seen. Men not at all in sympathy with religious things would lay down the hoe in the field, or suspend any other labor, and go into the house for conversation and prayer. Uncle John seemed unwilling to pass any house.

"The last night he was in our place, as the bell was ringing and we were on our way to church, we noticed a group of men on the steps of a store opposite the post-office. Among them was a loud-mouthed and low-mouthed scoffer. He beckoned from the crowd, saying, 'Captain, I want to speak to you.'

"'Do you mean *me*?' asked Uncle John. 'Yes,' was the reply. Uncle John told me to go on and open the meeting, and promptly crossed the street where the blasphemer stood. The man's first remark was that if Uncle John did not leave the place within twenty-four hours he would 'give him a thrashing.' Uncle John kindly but fearlessly replied that his engagements would compel him to go the following day, but that if the arrangements were not already made he would certainly remain. Some of the best citizens witnessed the interview and were deeply impressed, when Uncle John, taking the abusive fellow's hand, plead with him and prayed till he was subdued to perfect silence. A number came over to our meeting that

night for the first time, declaring that if they had any moral influence they wanted to cast it on that side.

"Among those who so sought to express their opinion of this transaction was the postmaster of the village and another prominent citizen, both of whom were converted; and another who had previously led a reckless life in relating his experience said that his conviction of sin started when he heard Uncle John so attacked. That exhibition of depravity convinced him of the exceeding 'sinfulness of sin.' Satan sometimes blunders fearfully. That night and there he overleaped himself.

"For months Sandisfield, Colebrook, Conn., Lee, Tyringham, and Monterey felt the effect of Uncle John's incessant labors, or perhaps we should put it—the power of God. He who called himself 'legs for Baxter and Bunyan' was a voice for Homer Merriam as well. The accessions to the churches following his labors were more than three hundred, and the man will be lovingly remembered in many a household for years to come. Even the children of tender age will long remember one who so much loved them and whom they so much loved."

Of this same memorable summer, and of this same vicinity, let a Christian woman speak, mentioning briefly a special case or two.

"In one family in Otis there were nine conversions, and most of them have been earnest workers in the good cause ever since. In another there were four brought to accept Christ, and there was hardly one household some member of which did not come to sing the wonders of redeeming grace. Often I heard Uncle John say, 'I can never

doubt any more, so wonderful have been the answers to prayer.'

"Only once do I remember seeing him introduced to a stranger to whom he did not say something about the great salvation. This one was an elderly lady who happened to be in the room when he called on business. He left the house and was perhaps as far as the gate when the omission occurred to him, and back again he came and talked with her and prayed.

"Mr. Vassar absorbed himself for the time being with the individual he was talking with, and by some happy gift made each one feel that he was deeply interested in his particular case. And there was no pretence in this. He took in rapidly the interesting points in any stranger's condition, with great tact drew out the religious state, and urged with impressiveness the importance of being at peace with God. The secret of this was that his whole heart was in the work of winning souls to discipleship with Christ, and the ground of his interest in others was, therefore, not, as so much it is with most of us, personal and worldly considerations, but eminently Christian and arising out of his habitual prayerfulness. It was, therefore, easy for him to make even a stranger see that he was cordially interested in his religious welfare. He followed closely the prudential maxims of Matt. 10, worked hard all the year round, and was manifestly denying himself much of what most men count essential to comfort. Loving, faithful, unobtrusive, without title or ordination, he preached the gospel like his divine Master, wherever he found a weary heart and ready ear. He was an evangelist

of whom all pastors spoke well; for he knew his work and never aimed to go beyond it."

Of his labors in Boston and vicinity Rev. Drs. Gordon and Fulton will elsewhere tell. Enough to say just here that his sterling worth and efficient services were recognized and appreciated by cultured Christian men as well as by a humbler class, and that to their homes and churches he was welcomed as a brother beloved in the Lord, and a laborer esteemed for his work's sake. Henry F. Durant, the founder of Wellesley College, in inviting him to his elegant home for a week, said to a mutual friend, "I consider myself more honored to entertain this man of God than to have a king for my guest."

In the Charlestown district, where for two winters he aided different pastors, one of them already quoted says, "The meetings we held were foretastes of heaven. Uncle John was at his best. He had great physical infirmities, but he rose above them, as he often said, 'by mighty faith and prayer.' Oh, what days those were! Would God we might see their like again. Hundreds entered into covenant with Christ and His church."

Of a week spent at Keyport, N. J., Rev. J. K. Manning, with whom he labored, has this to say:

"We were in the midst of a powerful revival when he came, and his first words after learning our condition were, 'I am not needed here. My chief work is among churches that are measurably cold or dead.' With difficulty he was persuaded to remain, and with the deacons go from house to house. The service he rendered in this way was grand.

"For three characteristics especially he is remembered here.

"First, his resort to prayer when met by cavilling or gainsaying tongues, and his readiness to plead with men, and for men, in any place, and in every circumstance.

"Second, his persistent holding of the penitent and inquiring soul to the promises of God as the means and source of comfort. He was the most faithful to the Word of God of any man I ever knew.

"Third, the impression made on all minds that doing good was the mission of his life. Many speak of him yet as the man who knew nothing excepting the seeking and saving of souls."

To another New Jersey pastor anxious to secure his services for a few days he writes:

"DEAR BROTHER LOVE:

"I have your kind letter, and rejoice to hear of the salvation of souls at Croton. God grant the work may be deep and widespread. I would come and help you if I could, but I have been four months with Dr. Tyng, who has received more than seven hundred this year into the membership of his church, and am now engaged elsewhere for a season. My heart is with you."

The "tent work" of Dr. Tyng's referred to above he will tell us of elsewhere. One who was with Uncle John all through it says, "Let me speak of one little prayer-meeting in the street. After the tent service one night a group of us were returning home together, our hearts full of joy over the scenes of grace and mercy from which

we had just come, and on the corner of Thirty-fourth Street and Madison Avenue we stopped beside an iron railing and began to sing and pray. It was a precious season, and the wandering street sweepers dropped their brooms and gathered quietly around, as under the stars declaring the glory of God in creation we sang of His greater glory in redemption through Christ our Lord."

Rev. S. L. Bowler, of Machias, Maine, now secured Uncle John's services for some of the more destitute regions of that State. In a single county there were a score of churches that had no pastor, most of them being too feeble to maintain one. The Maine Missionary Society cordially cooperated with the lay evangelist, and the results everywhere else witnessed were here quickly seen and felt.

From one of the churches thus visited and blest a Christian man sends these lines:

"His labors here were crowned with great success. The church was quickened; souls were saved; every house in the place I think was visited, and he conversed with nearly every person in the town. One young sea captain who was evidently failing with consumption interested Uncle John very much. He had not been married long, and neither he nor his wife had the Christian's trust. Oh, how he did entreat them! and even when praying elsewhere, especially at our family devotions, he would break out with 'Oh, God, bless the captain and his wife.' The prayer was fully answered. Both were happily converted. He died soon after, and she has followed him now to the other side.

"While he was with us our only child first manifested an interest in religious things, and the very walls of our house seem to have been made sacred by his many prayers.

"I can never forget our last interview. He had gone on board the steamer after commending us tenderly to the Lord and bidding us good-by, until I had occasion again to see him at nearly eleven o'clock at night. Quietly I went to his berth thinking he might be asleep, and found him repeating over the names of persons in our place. He said he was doing it that he might carry them individually to God in prayer. As the parting hand was finally given he said, 'I am an old man, and shall probably go before you, but by the grace of God I shall expect to meet you again in heaven.' His prediction has proved correct. God grant his hope may find its realization."

From another source these reflections come:

"I cannot help thinking that, if Uncle John had lived in Galilee about A. D. 30, he would have been either one of the twelve, or else of the seventy, and quite as companionable with Jesus as any of them. As it is, I doubt whether his apostolic namesake loved his Saviour any better."

"One instance of his spiritual insight and modesty I recall. Rev. Jacob Knapp was laboring in a series of revival meetings in Chicago, and Uncle John was there. Day after day the mighty evangelist preached, and although crowds thronged the church still there were no manifest fruits. No one sought the Lord. No one asked for prayer. It had not been so before. Had God forgotten to be gracious? The enemies of Christ only mocked. The

evangelist in his trouble went to see Uncle John, and asked of him the explanation of the mystery. 'Why is it,' said Elder Knapp, 'that I seem to be laboring in vain, and spending my strength for naught?' About that time the evangelist had bought a farm containing sixteen hundred acres, and probably his mind was somewhat 'of the earth earthy.' Uncle John heard his story through, and then said in his modest way, 'Dear Brother Knapp, it is not for the Lord's poor dust to attempt to give you any light, but I have been wondering how one of the Lord's diamonds *could shine with sixteen hundred acres of earth on it.*' The evangelist took the gentle wise rebuke, the earth was shaken from off the diamond, and the light so shone that God was glorified in the conversion of a multitude of souls."

The following account of one of the most extensive ingatherings of souls in which for the last year or two of life he shared, is from the pen of Mr. J. C. Tiffany, who was with him through it, and in later labors in Greene County, N. Y.

"About the first of February, 1877, a revival of God's work was progressing in the M. E. church of Coxsackie, N. Y. Its pastor, Rev. Gideon Draper, becoming weary under prolonged efforts, requested the writer to see if he could not obtain some help from abroad. I arrived in New York in the evening, and attended service at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Dr. S. H. Tyng, Jr., Rector. There I heard Uncle John Vassar pray with great unction and power. I applied to Dr. Tyng for aid, and out of the largeness of his heart he arranged to send his then assist-

ant, Rev. Mr. Humpstone, for a few days, and Uncle John for a longer time. They went up to Coxsackie at once. The pastor and official board were at a store waiting to meet us. They began to lay plans of work. Uncle John took off his hat and said, 'Let us pray about it.' This was something new to us, and the customers in the store had whereof to talk.

"Before night came he had struck in among the people in his usual way, and many were saying that we had got a crazy man to help us. He called right up to meeting time, stopping only to get a hasty meal. The effect was seen the first evening in an increased attendance. Seeing the backwardness of many Christians, a consecration meeting among them was proposed. It was a season never to be forgotten. Coldness melted away, denominational lines were broken down, and the people of God were ready for their work. A daily noon prayer-meeting was started. Christians of all names came into it. Many young men came in and turned to God. Strong men bowed themselves at Jesus' feet, and many hardened sinners found a Saviour. It was no unusual thing to have from eight to fifteen conversions in a single day. Some answers to prayer were wonderful.

"After four weeks thus spent at the Landing we went to the upper village, and the First Reformed Church opened its doors for the service. The work of salvation started the first day. Old difficulties were reconciled, and estranged neighbors or brethren made one. Old grudges and animosities, which had gone so far as to prevent those sharing them from speaking to each other, were swept

away. At one of the noon prayer-meetings a divine power fell on the people such as Uncle John himself confessed that he had never seen displayed.

"The room in which the meeting was held was offered by a man who held a license to sell liquor, and who kept a grocery. The offer was accepted, and the young men soon had it ready for occupation. The meeting was crowded. A few remarks were made in regard to Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, when he said, 'Jesus wept.' A power came which made every head of Christian and sinner bow on the seat before it. For a few moments an awful stillness followed which was broken by the cries for mercy from the son of the man who had given the room; then one of his companions, then others. The room could not accommodate to bow in prayer, so the ladies were left in that, and the men sought places in neighboring houses. It was a scene for Cocksackie. Fathers went through the streets with children, sons almost of age crying and weeping, and others praying for mercy. Each day he selected some brother to visit with him from house to house. Many were the souls thus savingly reached.

"On one of his visits he came with his companions to a house where there was a family party of seven adults, non-professors. He soon had the strong men and women bowed in prayer; all promised to seek salvation. They were all rejoicing in a very few days, and as the result, two of the number are now deacons in the church, and all happy in the Lord. Members of different churches came forward to help, and, young and old, all pressed forward longing for a fresh baptism of the Holy Ghost. Uncle

John knew no differences. He was working for souls for the Master, and all recognized his zeal.

"The apparent result of the work was that over three hundred were added to the churches there, while some joined elsewhere. More than one hundred of this number were young business men between eighteen and thirty years of age, the most of whom are active working Christians still. Schoolhouse meetings were started in the country round about, which are yet kept up, and in which conversions are from time to time occurring now, resulting from seed then sown.

"Many who were then converted have already entered into rest. They have again met the dear old man, but this time at the feet of the Master, where they will part no more. We who remain are going on to join the heavenly throng saved by grace divine."

These attacks "all along the line" were coming to an end. There is but one more that we shall mention or give the details of in this chapter. It was at Greenville, Greene County, N. Y., where it was made, and Rev. W. P. Gibson reports it.

"My first impression on seeing Uncle John at my gate was that he was some old wide-awake farmer turned book-agent, who had come to the parsonage having a special axe to grind; but as he had been at my house once when I was absent, my family recognized him, and he was soon perfectly at home. Seven weeks we spent together traveling those hills, talking, preaching, praying; and it was nearly his last work here below.

"On one occasion he was seen praying with a group of

men along the road, and was published as an escaped lunatic in our village paper. Sometimes his kind approaches were repulsed, but *never, so far as I am aware, by a non-professor of religion*. In one or two instances nominal Christians declined having any conversation with him, or any prayer offered in their homes, asserting that they belonged to the church and had no need of such service.

"When introduced to any one he lost no time in pressing home that all important question, 'My dear son!' or 'My dear daughter, have you been born again?' and if there was any hesitancy, his well-worn testament was opened spontaneously to the words 'Ye must be born again.' And then he would graphically describe the interview between Christ and Nicodemus, or picture the scene among the bitter Israelites when Moses lifted up the serpent (typical of Christ) for the gaze of the dying. And every brief interview closed with prayer, by himself or the 'dear pastor' and sometimes all the praying members of the household were pressed to join, or a trembling soul seeking light was encouraged to put up a short broken petition. On one occasion, a back-slidden sister was tearfully seeking for peace and pardon but could see no light. He saw at once that it was unbelief, and said, 'My dear, you must believe when you pray'; and bid her say over and over, 'I do believe, I will believe; help thou my unbelief.' It was not long before peace came. Sometimes the interview occurred on the street; after a few faithful words, off went his hat without warning and a short petition went up to God for a blessing on the message.

"After visiting all day, he would give a detailed ac-

count of his visits, calling the name of every member of the families met, and their spiritual condition. He would then kneel and pour out his heart for them, one by one, naming each particular case in his petition. He was quick to detect the secret of a cold and half-hearted profession.

"His modesty forbade his leading the meetings unless specially requested, but his stirring exhortations and moving petitions told upon the audience powerfully at times. I remember a few impassioned appeals that were truly eloquent with lofty and well-expressed thought. His singing too was a great help. Though his voice was somewhat weakened and roughened by age, he sang with the spirit, and his selections invariably fitted the places where they came in. On one occasion we were singing at family worship,

*'Oh, why was He there as the bearer of sin
If on Jesus my sin was not laid?'*

As the thought took possession of him he exclaimed, 'Sure enough,' and repeating the lines he laughed and wept for very joy.

"Dear Uncle John! his stay with us was like an angel's visit, and we cherish his words and looks in memory, as of one very intimate with Jesus, and dwelling even here 'quite on the verge of heaven.'"

During these meetings one who roomed with him many nights says: "At this time he was suffering severely from the disease which caused his death, and the pain at intervals was fearful. During one of these intervals, when he supposed me sleeping, after being up for a while he

came back to bed and laid down as carefully as a mother would by her sick child for fear of disturbing me, and then in an underbreath I heard him say, '*Dear Lord, how much better this than sin!*' "

Another, writing of a date perhaps earlier, says: "A little incident occurred which pleased me very much the night he stopped with us. When I went to show him to his room I said on entering it, 'We call this the prophet's chamber. Many ministers have occupied it, but it is doubly hallowed to us since in it our dear old pastor laid off his robe of flesh and went to God.' Uncle John's face fairly beamed with delight as he exclaimed, 'Oh, I am so glad to know that there is a passage direct from here to heaven!' "

He was ripening now rapidly. He was soon to see the King in his beauty.

CHAPTER IX

WEAPONS IN THE FIGHT

It is exceedingly difficult to analyze what men call personal power. It is easily recognized and readily confessed, but its elements are not easily discovered or described. John Vassar struck blows that fell heavy and cut deep. What were the weapons used? Dropping the figure, what made him the man he was?

Certain constitutional peculiarities probably helped: natural ardor, vivacity, persistency, sympathy, had something to do with the work. We will not leave them altogether out of the account. But the real springs of character were not in these. The palm of the desert, fruitful and beautiful, does not find its supplies in itself. Nor does it find them in the burning, blistering sand out of which it grows. The sources of its life lie deeper down. Far underneath are veins of water at which its rootlets drink and from which they draw up nourishment which keeps the uppermost and outmost leaves fresh and fair when sultry suns are smiting. A consecrated life depends on unseen and eternal sources for what it is and what it gives. Some of Uncle John's characteristics have of necessity been brought in sight, and the secret sources of their strength have been glimpsed as we have gone along. They need, however, to be set in a stronger light, and all eyes turned

on them ; for the practical effect of this book will be short-lived and superficial unless Christian men can be made to see what are, and must ever be, the elements as well as the sources of personal spiritual power.

Though it may involve more or less repetition, then let the strong points of the man be stated and emphasized, and further illustrated.

Unflinching loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ, based on an adoring love, was the mainspring to all he was and all he did.

Somebody has said of Arnold of Rugby that "the central fact of his experience was his close, conscious, and ever-realized union and friendship with the Lord Jesus; and that in the ever-flowing fulness of his heart every expression of affection that might pass between earthly friends passed between him and the Divine Man whom as a friend he had in heaven, and to whom with an exhaustless enjoyment he clung." A picture in words this of Uncle John. An irreverent mention of the Saviour's name would cause him keen distress. While we were residing in Lynn, Mass., he made us several flying visits, on one of which a Unitarian gentleman of the city said to him, in a flash of irritation, "Sir, to pay divine honor to this Jesus of Nazareth of whom you talk so much is in my opinion insulting to the Almighty." It was hours before Uncle John got over that. It pained him more than if child or brother had received a cruel thrust.

And he was just as sensitive if there was no recognition of that Name where he thought it ought to have a place. One day he came out of W—— Street church, where a

noted minister had preached, and with a grieved, disappointed look and a quivering voice he said, "Oh, T——, he never mentioned the name of Jesus once."

And in all this there was not a particle of pretence or cant. This love of Christ was not a fancy or a sentiment. It was a principle, a passion, an abiding motive. It was the antidote against worldliness. It was the incentive to action which this world could not understand, and for which it sometimes had nothing more than scorn.

When they were probing among his shattered ribs for the fatal bullet, the French veteran exclaimed, "A little deeper, and you will find the emperor." In Uncle John's heart the deepest emotion was love for his Saviour. Deeper than the love of home, deeper than the love of kindred, deeper than the love of country, aye deeper than the love of life, was his affection for that Redeemer who had first loved him and given Himself for him. He did not talk so much of heaven as many Christians do. He talked of being with the Lord and like Him. That was his ideal of the coming blessedness.

Out of this attachment grew what was probably the next most prominent feature of his life, and one of the mightiest forces in his work—*his habitual and almost unbroken intercourse with God in prayer.*

A man who came so near a literal compliance with the apostolic charge, "Pray without ceasing," few Christians in these latter days have known. One long his pastor, and longer still his friend, bears testimony on this point that a stranger might think too strong, but every word of which hundreds would indorse.

"He absolutely prayed day and night. Prayed about everything. Prayed over everything. Prayed for almost everybody, and prayed with almost everybody whom he met. He prayed when he went out, and when he came in. He prayed before every religious service, and then prayed all the way through it. I have roomed with him night after night, and rarely went to sleep without hearing him at prayer, or awoke without finding him at prayer. He seldom, if ever, came into my house or study that he did not propose a season of prayer, no matter how brief might be the call, or what the errand that brought him there."

In a prayer-meeting he was a host. If a spirit of dullness or heaviness pervaded it, somehow it seemed, as he began to wrestle, to be lifted off. One of the members of his own church who has already been quoted tells what animation his simple presence gave to the little company that met there in the usual devotional meetings of the week.

"He was often sent home to rest by the Tract Society, but before he would go home even he would stop into the prayer-meeting of his church if it happened to be going on. If we did not see him enter we would quickly know that he was there. Oh, how he would wrestle for the dear old church in which he was born again! Then how he would recount recent wonders of redeeming grace, keeping himself all the time in the background and giving God the glory. No matter how truthfully we might have been singing

*'Hosannas languish on our tongues.
And our devotion dies.'*

it seemed as we listened to him as good to be there as it was to the apostles to be on the mount of transfiguration, and the Lord granted us such revelations of Himself as made our place of prayer something like that hilltop for radiance."

Interwoven with these other qualities there was in Uncle John *a mighty faith*.

No place and no case seemed too hard or too hopeless for him to grapple with. Forbidding circumstances and a gloomy outlook never shook his trust nor tied his tongue. Indeed, he saw no gloomy outlook, for he did not look *out* so much as *up*. If asked what the prospect was in any direction, he would have said, with Adoniram Judson. "As bright as the promises of God." He did not believe simply in the God of ages ago. He believed in the God of to-day. He could not be persuaded that the wonder-working Spirit finished His operations at Pentecost. He could not be convinced that the supernatural was no longer to be looked for. He could see no reason why the modern Saul of Tarsus should not be as sharply called and as suddenly turned as the ancient persecuting zealot was. When going on what others regarded as "a forlorn hope," he would go into the closet and beg for a special anointing, an enduement of power from on high, and then with a deepened confidence start out. "One day he went to call on a lady whose husband was a skeptic and a bitter opposer of religion. The man saw him entering

the gate, and stepping to the door, said, 'You are coming here to pray with my wife, I presume. Now let me tell you I don't allow any prayer in this house. Leave at once, and never show your face here again.' Uncle John hesitated a moment, then left, and going to his stopping-place plead long and earnestly for help to reach that case. Rising from his knees, and 'nothing doubting,' he went straight back to the house from which he had been less than an hour before repulsed. The man again met him, and after a moment's parleying told him that if he would not pray he might come in. Uncle John refused to make any such promise, but nevertheless got in. An urgent message from God was soon ringing in the unbeliever's ears, and before the interview ended, humbled and subdued he was bowing by the side of Uncle John listening to supplications for his own salvation."

Again and again, when assured that a contemplated effort would be fruitless, that it would be the sinking of a bucket in a dry well, and the bringing of nothing up, he would beg the privilege of trying. He would get a church or a school-house open, and then explore the region to invite the people out. Almost invariably a revival would commence. Often God would triumph gloriously. Converts would be multiplied. Dull churches or dull Christians would get aglow. There would be apostolic work because it was underlaid and pushed with apostolic faith.

His *acquaintance with the Bible was very intimate and thorough*, every promise and penalty and precept and prophecy being apparently at his command.

To him Scripture was the one standard of Christian

truth. To its teachings nothing was to be added; from its decisions there could be no appeal. In dealing with errorists, the only question he would allow himself to look at was, What has God said? The moment anything like quibbling or cavilling was heard, out would come his well-worn Testament, and text after text would be turned to till captious lips were closed. The inspired Word was the book he studied most. It was to him exactly what it claims to be—"the sword of the Spirit"; and what was the hilt, and what the blade, and how to get hold of the one and smite with the other, was what he sought to know. The authenticity of Scripture he never stopped to argue. He boldly assumed that, and then by its utterances every opinion must be hewed and squared.

We shall make a great mistake, however, if we get the impression that he studied the Bible chiefly as a controversialist. It was not so much an armory whence to draw weapons as a well whence to draw waters for a thirsty soul. The daily draught was a refreshing and delight. Out of the divine testimonies he drew help and comfort in every case. If he found himself after a day of hard labor with half an hour of spare time before an evening meal or meeting, he would seize the inspired volume as eagerly as he would a letter from home, and some sweet promise, read perhaps for the thousandth time, would bring a smile to his face, and put audible praise upon his tongue.

Nor was it only the doctrinal and devotional portions of Scripture that he pored over and enjoyed. The prophecies were a mine of wealth that he dug into as a treas-

ure-seeker might dig into beds of precious ore. Along their dimmest passages, and in their obscurest recesses, he traced the footprints of his Lord. Christ coming or Christ to come again, and the fortunes of His cause between the first and second advents, he saw promised and presaged at every step. And it is but just to say that while all might not accept his interpretations of prophecy, or the views to which they led, none could doubt that his knowledge of their letter was extensive and exact.

This exhaustive acquaintance with God's word could not fail to make itself felt. Men saw that he was not dogmatically insisting on his own notions or impressions or conceits. They were asked not to listen to him or to believe him, but the message which God had sent. The very reverence with which he treated the message showed that he regarded it as God-sent. And when he came with comfort, though the manner might be human, the matter was divine. It was not the weak, uncertain words of earth he spoke; it was the strong, infallible words of heaven. Such utterances must carry weight. What many may think or feel is perhaps of little consequence; what God says is of vital importance to a thoughtful soul.

Perhaps the quality that would be noticed soonest and most deeply felt was the man's burning *zeal*. It glowed in the awful earnestness with which he pressed his personal appeals. We use the word "awful" advisedly and deliberately, for no other would be as exact.

A writer in the *Watchman*, of Boston, refers to it in this story—a story so characteristic that any one who

knew Uncle John would have inferred that he was the man referred to had no name been given.

"While laboring with me a few years since in Boston, he wished to call on a Christian gentleman who was living at one of our fashionable boarding-houses. A young friend of mine who went with him to show him the place reported what occurred. While waiting in the parlor to be shown to the gentleman's room, he opened conversation with a very fashionable and proud-looking lady who was sitting in the room. With great concern he began to urge the necessity of the new birth and immediate acceptance of Christ upon her. She was thunderstruck, and protested that she did not believe in any of those things. Then followed a most fervent appeal, texts of Scripture, warnings against rejecting Christ, the certainty of a wrath to come for any found in impenitence, till at last my friend said he was fairly alarmed at the boldness of the assault. Suddenly the gentleman came in for whom he was waiting and called him out. The friend sat watching from behind his newspaper for the effect of the interview. In a moment the lady's husband came in. 'There has been an old man here talking with me about religion,' she said. 'Why did you not shut him up?' he asked gruffly. 'He is one of those persons you *can't* shut up,' was her reply. 'If I had been here,' he said, 'I would have told him very quickly to go about his business.' 'If you had seen him *you would have thought he was about his business,*' was her answer. No truer tribute could be paid to him than that. Never did I see one who could 'close in with a soul,' as the old

Puritans used to phrase it, as he could." Rev. S. B. Almy of Mattewan wrote :

"In Uncle John a mind of natural strength and fervency had received a powerful impulse from on high. To him, religious things were not invisible and distant, they were seen and present. His awakened soul accepted Bible truths as living and wonderful realities. Christ's cross and judgment-seat seemed very near, radiant with tender attractions and with awful glories. The curtain concealing futurity had fallen; and from beholding the endless destinies of the righteous and the wicked, he turned to his fellow-men, and earnestly besought them to seek the divine favor and preparation for heaven.

"His practical zeal for God and souls, arising from a vivid realization of the truths of religion, was no temporary flame. Burning with wonderful brightness, and with marvellous fervor, it was the immediate cause of his ceaseless activity.

"His intellect and emotions were stirred. The wisdom of perception was united to the vitalizing gloss of ardent feeling. A man of ordinary capacity, hurled ever forward by burning zeal, will perform more than he of tenfold ability cold and passionless. The most sluggish are moved by the magnetic power of a master-mind stirred to its depths by a mighty purpose. It was zeal that possessed David Livingstone, and drove him into the unknown regions of Africa—that held him in Africa until he died on bended knee, hugging Africa to his heart in dying prayer. It is not when man has zeal, but when zeal has

the man, filling, controlling, inspiring him, that success is sure."

More than this, Uncle John possessed remarkable *persistence of purpose*.

Zeal is sometimes flashy and fitful. It is good for a dash, but not for a siege. It takes hold well, but it does not keep hold. In the heathery turf of Scotland there is a plant whose roots run but a little distance and then terminate as squarely as if they had been chopped off. The superstitious country folks around assert that great medicinal virtue originally dwelt in these roots, and that to destroy it the great enemy of man once bit them off. A quaint fancy, of course, but something very like it is the fact in many a life. Good plans are frustrated; praiseworthy schemes issue in nothing; pious activities result in failure, because an inconstant will is allowed to bite them off.

Uncle John's tenacity was wonderful. It was hard to shake him off. We entered a house of our congregation with him one day where we met a young man from Virginia who had come North to attend school. The others present being Christians, Uncle John soon fastened all the conversation upon him. We never saw him so press and push a soul. He had found a lost sheep, and seemed determined, "shepherd's dog" that he was, to keep at it till he had worried it home. Again and again we feared that he was crowding too hard and too far. But he had been out on many such a service before, and what he was about he knew very well. Before the house was left, a sincere penitent was on his knees pleading for mercy, and was soon

rejoicing in Christ as his portion. Three or four years have gone since then, and the one so wrestled with, a useful and earnest Christian now, has many a time blessed the Lord that he was not given up that day.

His *tact* was a characteristic that should not be underestimated or left unnamed.

"He seldom made a blunder. His knowledge of human nature seemed almost intuitive. He read men at a glance, and pierced the surface of things as by magic. He knew how to approach men, what to say to them, and when to have done with them. He adapted himself to all classes and conditions when talking of Christ. The school-girl or the college professor, the millionaire or the hard-handed son of toil, a sailor or a soldier—with equal readiness and skill he met them all. His mind was a perfect storehouse of Scripture, and he had a verse on his tongue's end to serve him at every time." It must be a very dull man whom he could not make to see, a very hard man whom he could not make to feel, a very stubborn man whom he could not to some extent bend, and a very sharp one whom he could not match. When any one attempted to foil him he would head him off by a move that might be called a piece of strategy. "On one occasion" (this from Dr. G. M. Stone) "he went to visit a young lady for religious conversation. She saw him approaching, and went upstairs to avoid him. Uncle John, upon coming in, comprehended the situation at a glance, and requested that the door of the stairway might be opened. He then knelt at the foot of the stairs and sent up a melting petition to God in behalf of the person named."

He was equal to any emergency that might arise. If any imagined that, because his heart was so tender, he could be easily outgeneralled; that, because he was guileless and unsuspecting, he could be taken at a disadvantage and put in an awkward place or plight, they would quickly find out their mistake. The *Christian Intelligencer* must be held responsible for this story—a story which illustrates this feature in his character, and is too good to be lost:

“While laboring in the Army of the Potomac he was called out of bed one night by a messenger, who represented that a soldier in a certain tent was in great distress of mind. On reaching the tent indicated he found several officers seated around a keg of beer which had been brought from Washington, and he was invited to join them and take a drink. Taking in the situation at a glance, he told them he could not do it without first asking the blessing of God. So, grasping the arm of the principal man, he fell on his knees and poured out an ardent prayer for the company, after which they were glad to let him go. The story got out, and for months afterward one of those men could hardly show his face without being asked about the prayer-meeting they had set up. Uncle John was too much for them.”

Any number of illustrations might be given, showing forth this characteristic, but we will add only this:

“Shortly after the evacuation of Richmond the American Tract Society sent a District Secretary with Uncle John into that city to establish a depository of its publications and a centre of colportage. As was right these

brethren sought the cooperation, at least the approval, of the pastors of the churches, a company of whom had assembled to consider their duty in the new emergency. The Secretary being allowed to speak, expressed the wish of his Society to coöperate with the brethren in rebuilding the wastes of the war, in reorganizing their Sabbath-schools and granting them libraries in lieu of those scattered. A prominent and honored divine, still smarting under the inflictions of the Union army, repelled the proffered help, rejected the extended hand of Christian friendship, and said somewhat warmly his people would prefer publications with the imprint of London to that of New York. Others spoke, and a storm was evidently rising when Uncle John in his quick and gentle way said, 'Let us pray,' and without a moment's hesitation was upon his knees, and poured out such a prayer as melted and harmonized all hearts, and as they rose the venerable pastor with tears and a warm handshake, said, 'Brethren, I cannot stand any longer in opposition to your Christian offer. My heart is with you.' Soon thereafter a colporteur was appointed in his locality, and has ever since continued his labors in that and adjoining places."

This other trait was most remarkably manifest in the man: *Under all inequalities of circumstance or condition he saw a soul to be saved, and realized its worth.* When he went to call on the President of the United States he paid him the respect due to his high office, but did not let go of his hand till he had spoken to him of the Lord Jesus and put to him most courteously the question that was ever on his lips.

When he was introduced to Brigham Young in his Salt Lake City home he made the same appeal, and pressed the same searching inquiry on his soul.

But Uncle John was just as solicitous for a private in the army, a negro in his cabin, a child in the Sunday-school. There was no difference between them in his eyes.

This is the story which his friend Rev. Mr. Hazard tells: "Uncle John and myself occupied adjoining rooms in a boarding-house near the Capitol at Washington in the winter of 1867. On going downstairs to breakfast one morning I found him standing there in earnest conversation with one of the colored servants, and it needed but a hasty glance to see that he was urging a most tender and affecting appeal for immediate attention to the concerns of the soul. Class or color was of little consequence to him. He was a 'winner of souls,' and I doubt if he left one his equal in this land when he passed away."

He was a man of deep and tender *sympathy*.

No matter what indifference, ingratitude, or even imposition he encountered, nothing could freeze over, nay, even chill, the generous sensibilities of his soul. Suffering of any sort would touch him to the quick. Nor would he show it only by words and tears. A sympathy that had nothing but sentiment in it he rated cheap. He was emotional, but he was practical as well. Pity did not glisten in his eye and drop from his tongue only. It sent his feet running on errands, and his hand helping wherever there was need. When Dr. Tyng had him at the Gospel Tent work in New York City he carried not only the Bread

of Life to starving souls, but many a literal loaf to hungry mouths.

Having access to our lines in war time to an extent which few enjoyed, he would fairly load himself down as he returned from Washington or Alexandria with parcels for the men. More than once he went from "the front" to the national capital when they were fifty miles apart to get some delicacies for suffering men, walking both ways, nor counted it a hardship as he trudged along.

In a time of affliction his heart went right out toward the smitten and sorrowing. He had gone through sore straits of anguish himself, and when others were in them he went to their sides to weep with those that wept and whisper of the Comforter.

While the body of Dr. Babcock lay in the house awaiting burial, Uncle John called, and was taken by the family into the room where the dear old pastor rested as if asleep. Approaching the casket, and looking down upon the face which death had so little changed, he exclaimed, "My Father, my Father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Then recalling the time of his conversion and the guiding counsels given by these now still lips, he said, "Under God I owe all that I am to this man." The prayer that followed we can imagine, not describe. The household group, bowed with him, say that while it was being offered they had such glimpses of the coming glory as lifted them on eagle's wings, and brought the deep peace of paradise very near.

He was a man of marked *humility*.

We are quite sure that no one ever heard him utter

a boastful word. "Unto me, who am *less than the least of all saints*, is this grace given"; this was the spirit in which he lived his life and did his work. He never sought to put himself forward or take the lead. No chaplain, preacher, pastor whom he was aiding ever felt that Uncle John was seeking to take the command or put the properly commissioned leader back. He was particularly careful to magnify the office of the Christian minister. In the agencies for bringing a lost world back to God he always put the living preacher first. Nor did he parade his personal piety, nor trumpet his attainments in the Christian life. Judged by all the standards that we know anything about, the mark he reached was very high; but no one would have learned that from his lips.

Dr. Stone says, "I once asked him what he thought of the doctrine of perfect sanctification in this life. His answer was, 'I do not doubt we may have high experiences of Christ's love, and great degrees of submission and joy, *but the difficulty is to keep there.*' Many times since I have felt the wisdom and spiritual insight of his words."

So anxious was he to avoid even the appearance of egotism that it was difficult to get him to speak of details and results of work which many, when he was talking publicly and privately, would have been pleased to hear.

And there was no affectation in this. Men saw that Uncle John's humility was genuine. Sincerity shone out in every word. He had no selfish ends to accomplish. He had no ambitious projects to carry out. The test he had to stand was searching. When a man emerges from obscurity

to be recognized as a positive force in the religious movements of his age, the retaining of an unmagnified self-estimate is difficult indeed. But here was a man who bore the test. Let others say what they might, he knew that he was just John Vassar, nothing more and nothing less. Self-seeking of every sort he scorned; nay, more, he abhorred it from his very heart. All who came in contact with him saw that he was not striving for honor or grasping for money; he had just one object, and that was to save their souls.

This enumeration of characteristics would be incomplete if we failed to mention *the broad and catholic spirit of the man*.

Denominationally he was a Baptist. The peculiar views and practices of that branch of the Saviour's church he intelligently and conscientiously held. In the proper place he would maintain and defend them. He refused, however, again and again, to leave the service of the Tract Society to engage in purely denominational work. He felt he could reach more men on its union basis than he could if laboring in the interests of a particular sect. And to turn men to righteousness was more important in his estimation than the gathering of them around this peculiar standard or that. He rendered a loyal allegiance to the ensign of his own particular corps, but the one flag on which the cross was blazoned he would lift over all. Around that first he would rally men, and then afterward have them go into such church relations as each might choose.

This being his great aim, he went among all churches

holding an evangelical faith, little caring what the name might be. And we doubt whether the sharpest-eared or the keenest-eyed critic would have detected the slightest difference in the testimony which he bore. One message he everywhere voiced. One need he emphasized. One Helper he pointed out. And it might be added that the style of working and the results witnessed were everywhere much the same—the same in kind at least if not in measure. We have in this volume statements from representative men in the Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Congregational, Episcopal, and Reformed churches, touching this man and his labors, and so much alike are the opinions which they pass, and the affection they express, that all of them might have been written by any single hand.

The strongest points in the man's character have now been sketched. It will seem like a poor, dull picture to those who knew the original when he was at his best. It may help, however, to show what made him such a power. Give to any man such qualifications in any such degree, and he will make himself felt. Nothing so gets hold upon the world, nothing so keeps hold, as an unselfish, consecrated life.

Next to the Holy Spirit in His sevenfold energies the great want of the church is godly men: men girded with awful zeal; men who beg no favors of worldly policy; men who have the staunch, uncompromising sincerity of old confessors, and yet whose speech is the benediction of charity. Men who will thrust in the unwilling face of darkness all the light of God, and whom no disappoint-

ments can palsy, no opposition embitter, and no misgivings keep back. Given such men, and they will have influence. Skeptics, moralists, easy-going religionists, will feel it. They may not understand it, they may not like it, but there will be something real about it; and, after all, readiness is what this world wants.

CHAPTER X

THE VETERAN DISABLED

JAMES HAMILTON says that old age is a sort of Terra del Fuego, a region where the weather never clears. Cloud and drizzle darken and dampen many of its days, and there is little reason to expect that it will be otherwise while life shall last.

Uncle John could hardly be called old when he began to break. Before he had seen sixty years infirmities were pressing heavily, and thereafter he saw few hours altogether free from pain. It is not strange that it was so. The only wonder is that his bodily vigor was retained unimpaired so long. Had he not come of sturdy stock he could not have borne the strain of the previous five-and-twenty years. His unflagging spirit constantly overlooked the body, or overestimated and overtaxed its powers. Nature will ultimately exact the penalty for such violation of her laws. No matter how good the object in the attainment of which strength is overtasked, the effect is not likely to be averted or escaped. God wrought no miracle to save his servant from the consequences of his exhausting and almost superhuman work.

For the last three or four years he was much of the time really unfit to keep about. Mind and body had been kept on the tightest stretch. They now needed rest. But

rest was precisely that of which he would not hear. His soul was as alert and eager as in his prime. Flesh and blood must serve it still. The feet must not stop running if they were tired. Let him keep right on till he dropped in the harness. That was the way he wanted it arranged. His Lord did not so order it.

A year before he entered on the rest that remaineth, the physical system got so utterly out of order that it stopped short, unable longer to obey the still resolute spirit that sought to urge it on.

The last public work undertaken was at Minden, Montgomery County, N. Y., the following account of which is given by Rev. J. H. Weber:

"In the summer of 1877, while visiting Coxsackie on the Hudson, I heard much of the labors which Uncle John had performed there the previous winter. It immediately occurred to me that he was just the man I had been praying for and looking for to assist me in meetings on my own field.

"Arrangements were made with the Tract Society, and on the third of December a letter came telling me to meet him at Fort Plain. When the train arrived the first man to step off was Uncle John. On the way to my house I saw he was sick, and determined to make it as comfortable and easy as possible by providing a warm room to stop in by night, and a horse to carry him around by day. He wanted to start out that very afternoon, but I persuaded him to rest.

"The next day we started out from house to house, and a day or two later he said to me, 'Brother Weber, we have

not got hold of the right string yet; but keep on praying, and the Lord will show it to us yet, before long.' That day I had a call for a funeral service at Bethel, and when he heard of it he appeared to feel impressed that the Lord would open the way there, and that that would be the place to take hold. During the funeral I was convinced that the Spirit was working there beyond a doubt, and so appointed meetings for the following week. The first night Uncle John did not get there, as he had a meeting fixed for elsewhere; but when an invitation was given nine rose for prayer.

"The next night he arrived and appeared to be in his element at once. He prayed, he sang, he talked, and the whole congregation seemed melted into tears. In his visitations no shop or store or house was passed.

"In one yard he saw a man of more than seventy chopping wood. Uncle John stopped and began to question him about his hope. He frankly avowed that he was a spiritualist, that he did not believe the Bible, but added that he was willing Uncle John should do all the good to others that he could. A few more words of entreaty were pressed on him, and then we passed along, Uncle John praying that God would 'save that dear old man.' To-day he is a consistent Christian, and a member of the Lutheran church.

"Into the stores and shops he would often run for a few minutes, and talk to those there found, and sometimes offer prayer. One man since his death has said to me, 'I don't believe that I should ever have been con-

verted if he had not come into my shop and prayed for me and plead with me as he did.'

"Sometimes a group of thoughtless or reckless young men would come into the evening service, and by talking and laughing disturb the meeting. Soon as anything of the kind was begun, Uncle John would quietly move that way, and getting into the knot would drop down and offer such a prayer as would shame them, and sometimes solemnize every soul.

"So for two weeks the work went on, till the last night came that he was to be with us. Such words of encouragement to the converts, such exhortations to the ungodly, it seems to me I never heard, nor do I expect ever to hear their like again. When the address was finished he fell upon his knees and offered the last prayer we were ever to listen to from his lips. When the service was over all crowded around him, anxious for one more grasp of his hand. To each there was a word of personal advice and a 'God bless you,' to which many a heart sent back a like response.

"When we parted the next morning, he said, 'The Lord be with you, my dear brother, and with this people; and remember old Uncle John Vassar sometimes in your prayers.'"

When he reached his home, with the last days of 1877, the labors of love which for more than a quarter of a century he had pushed so unremittingly were substantially at an end. For more than six months he lay entirely prostrate, passing through frequent paroxysms of pain that were pitiful to behold, and that medical skill was powerless

to prevent or greatly lighten. When midsummer came he began to rally, and for a time it seemed not impossible that he might yet do a little light work in the vineyard of the Lord. He was seen upon the streets once more, and filled occasionally his seat in the sanctuary on the Sabbath or in the social meetings of the week. His once quick step had grown slow, but his voice was clear, and something of the old smile again lit up his face. It was only the brief brightening of the lamp, however, preparatory to the going out.

CHAPTER XI

HONORABLY DISCHARGED

*"His soul to Him who gave it rose;
God led it to its long repose,
Its glorious rest.
And though the warrior's sun has set,
Its light shall linger round us yet,
Bright, radiant, blest."*

IN the early autumn of 1878 the tokens of improvement were quite marked. He regarded them as indications to buckle the harness on again, and began to lay plans for the weeks ahead.

Under date of October 1st, to Rev. Mr. Owen, of Wyoming County, N. Y., he thus writes:

"DEAR BROTHER OWEN: I am getting better every day, and can work some. Please write to New York to the Secretary, Rev. G. L. Shearer, and see if I cannot come to you at once. I think the Lord will work for His glory in your place. How can I reach you, and what will be the railroad fare?"

October 9th he sends another postal, realing thus:

"The Society and my doctor both say I cannot come to you; but I want to come and see the salvation of our God once more. Send me a card and tell me the route."

The Society now interposed its authority, and peremptorily forbade him to engage in any kind of work. They saw the ruling passion so asserting itself, and were so fearful it might hurry him into engagements that he was utterly unfit to fill that they even required him for his own protection to sign a paper obligating himself for the present to keep still. The enforced idleness was painful to him, and but for the giving of such a promise he would probably have made some feeble and futile attempt to gird on the old responsibilities.

October came toward its close, and though weak he was tolerably comfortable. With the last days of the month the Prophetic Conference was to meet in the church of his good friend, Dr. S. H. Tyng, Jr. He felt sure he might venture to attend this gathering, and the family, seeing his anxiety, assented to his plans. Accompanied by his eldest son, he went to New York, visited again those with whom he had been so long associated in the Tract House, and spent a pleasant Sabbath among dear Christian friends. The meetings of the Conference in Holy Trinity, where he had enjoyed some blessed seasons previously, were to him a great delight. He was a firm believer in the general doctrines there discussed, and had been for many years. His saintly father had held to "that blessed hope," and to Uncle John it was just as sweet. Concerning it we are not here called upon to speak. Only this in passing should be said, that if the doctrine—as is sometimes urged—does relax the hand of pious effort, and weaken faith in the Gospel's power to save, it certainly did not produce in him its natural fruits.

This reunion with old brethren and friends seemed to act like a tonic. He was more like himself than he had been for months. Dr. Tyng says that as he went out from the church for the last time he looked up at it, and thinking of the great numbers who in it, or through its services, had been led to Christ, he lifted up his hands and said, "*God bless the dear old soul-trap.*"

Inelegant the term, but blessedly expressive.

For a week or more after reaching home he seemed better than before his trip. He was able to attend one or two of the evening meetings in his own church, and those who listened to him said that almost the old fire and fervor appeared to flash. Then came a most distressing relapse. All the favorable symptoms disappeared. The two elder boys—one from New York, and one from St. Louis—were summoned home.

Three weeks of intense suffering followed, completely exhausting his little remaining strength. There were no spiritual raptures such as many supposed would be given him on a dying bed. As the body wasted, the quick, active mind declined. The strong, earnest spirit seemed to share in the prostration of the earthly house it so long had lived in. The mortal tabernacle was falling, and the immortal tenant felt the jar.

The last day came. It was Friday, December 6th. His faithful medical attendant, Dr. A. B. Harvey, came in to make his usual call. For more than a quarter of a century he had been the family physician, the firm friend, the loving Christian brother. His practised eye saw that the end was not far away, and a few hours later

he came again. Then frankly he told the sinking man that the parting time had come. Tenderly he recalled their past experiences, joyfully he spoke of their common hopes, tearfully he bade him good-by till they should meet again in the house of many mansions. The departing veteran seemed surprised. He had not thought the change so near. Even when so plainly told that he was at the river's brink and soon must go across, only partially did he appear to realize the fact, and parted with the doctor as if fully expecting to see him the following day.

In the afternoon the household became convinced that only a few hours remained. All gathered around his bed—the wife, who for twenty-four years had been his companion and counsellor, Walter, Albert, Hattie, Johnnie—the living children of his love. He knew them all, and seemed pleased that they were near. That was about all he appeared to note. The brief December day darkened into night. The group of watchers was enlarged by the arrival of a sister, a niece, and one or two other friends. Gently, painlessly, but silently, he was passing into the presence of the holy God. An hour before the end came the lips moved, and the wife, bending over him, caught the word “farewell—farewell.” Once again there was a faint whisper. It was “Hallelujah!” just that, and nothing more.

A little after seven o'clock the last breath fluttered from between the whitening lips. The soldier had received his discharge. The victor had gone to get and wear his crown.

*"One day, his voice was heard in Israel
Amid her bannered legions, crying Cheer!
To God's elected hosts in holy war;
Another, and he dropped his tempered blade,
And hushed his battle-cry, his warning note,
And trailed his standard in the dust of death.*

*But 'twas a glorious exchange for him!
His sword laid down, he took the sceptre up;
His call to arms, changed to the victor's song;
His war-worn banner, to triumphant robes;
His dying bed, to an undying throne."*

On Monday afternoon, December 9th, those who loved the man bore his body to its rest. The day was dark with storm. Early there was a heavy snow-fall, later came on a drenching rain. The church on Mill Street nevertheless was filled. Taking into account the condition of the streets, it was as large a funeral gathering as Poughkeepsie has often seen. The city of his birth and lifelong residence kept a sacred memorial day. Uncle John's favorite Psalm, the one hundred and third, was read by his long-time friend, Dr. Stone, of Tarrytown.

Dr. Kendrick, his pastor, then dwelt briefly on the man's career. "If I were preaching a funeral sermon over Uncle John," he said, "this should be my text: 'The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.'

"If he had a coat of arms, the proper device for it would have been a burning heart. Though zealous, he

was not censorious. He lived in a higher sphere of spiritual life than his brethren, but he was always most patient with them. 'He allured to heaven and led the way.' Though his zeal was not properly one-sided or narrow, it still took very much the direction of anxiety for souls. And his efforts always kept even pace with his intense desires. If no opportunities offered for doing good, he went in search of them. In this respect I have never known his like."

Dr. Stephen H. Tyng, Jr., of New York, followed Dr. Kendrick. He said: "I parted with Uncle John at the throne of grace; I expect to meet him next at the throne of glory. He was like Bunyan in the originality and depth of his experience; like Harlan Page in his personal endeavors; like Hedley Vicars in his soldierly firmness. He might have been a capitalist, but he chose to live for Christ. His history will stand out as a representation of all unselfishness."

Rev. Dr. Fulton, of Brooklyn, said: "In this life now closed I hear the echoes of that apostolic shout of triumph, 'Thanks be unto God who always causeth us to triumph in Christ.' Uncle John took no glory to himself; he found in the Lord Jesus the source of his power, and the earnest of his victory. He started as a humble colporteur. He grew to be a master in Israel. It was in Boston I first saw him. There was a meeting in Tremont Temple, and God was there. Uncle John was in the city, and having a spare hour, dropped in. I obtained his help for a while. How he took hold! I hardly saw him, but how he did pull sinners out of the fire! Day after day

he brought in trophies and laid them at the Master's feet. Once I got him on a Sunday afternoon to take my place in the pulpit at the 'Temple' and address the crowds that filled those seats. It was one of the most impressive discourses I ever heard.

"In the school-houses and country churches of New England his face has been seen. Over its bleak hills and through its valleys his feet have carried him as he sought the wandering sheep. He is now with Jesus, and is crowned a hero evermore."

Rev. Dr. Stevenson and Rev. George L. Shearer, Secretaries of the Tract Society, were on the platform, and the former spoke of the traits of character which made Uncle John "the most laborious and the most useful Christian layman of his age." He was declared to have been "undisguisedly frank and straightforward, fearless in reproof, unflinching in maintaining the right, gently firm in reclaiming the erring, magnetic in action, fervent in prayer, convincing in argument, resistless in appeal, wise in all necessary worldly wisdom, undisturbed in emergencies, and, above all and beyond all, had all these characteristics so suffused and energized and directed by the Spirit of Christ as to make him the most successful lay missionary of modern days."

Rev. J. Hyatt Smith uttered the closing words. He said: "John Vassar illustrated more fully than any man whom I ever knew the apostle's ideal, 'diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.'" Tenderly and touchingly he dwelt upon the intimacies and memories of thirty years, and the ties which during those years had not

only been preserved unweakened, but had steadily grown stronger.

Dr. Wheeler, of Poughkeepsie, pastor of the Presbyterian Church, then led in prayer, thanking God for the man, and the grace that had made him what he was; and then the choir, as a fitting close to what had been a joyful and triumphant service, sang:

*"I know not the hour when my Lord shall come
To take me away to His own dear home;
But I know that His presence will lighten the gloom,
And that will be glory for me."*

After the singing, hundreds passed around to look upon the well-known face—"a face that, despite the storm, despite suffering, despite death, was in perfect peace."

It was a mixed company that passed by the casket for a parting look. The most honored citizens of the community were in it, and every intermediate social grade between them and the poorest blacks, and by all he was sincerely mourned.

The afternoon was far spent when his beloved brethren, Richard Brittain, Thomas Hull, Stephen Hull, R. E. Lansing, Christian Mattern, James Smiley, and Adam Caire, as bearers, laid the body in the receiving tomb on the Hudson's banks, resting in the blessed trust expressed in Christian prayer for ages, that "through the grave and gate of death" he should "pass to a joyful resurrection."

CHAPTER XII

SERVICE REVIEWED

*"Champion of Jesus—man of God,
Servant of Christ, well done!"*

THE natural limits of this memoir have been already reached. The story of this humble, godly, useful life has been told, and it might properly be left to go before men's eyes without the addition of another line.

But in many of the strongest and most influential churches of New York, Brooklyn, Boston, Hartford, and other large cities and in the rural churches throughout the country, Memorial sermons were preached and Memorial services held and these unusual and almost unprecedented marks of affection and respect deserve recognition. And another remarkable fact should also be mentioned. The leading secular and religious periodicals of the country gave generous and appreciative tributes to the memory of "Uncle John Vassar."

A few selected tributes from church and press are here presented.

"The Rev. G. L. Shearer, of the Tract Society, speaking of his army labors, said that, 'he seemed to be everywhere where he was most wanted. He marched with the soldiers and bore all their hardships, carrying often the guns and knapsacks of younger men whose strength had

failed. In the hospital he was as tender as a mother to the wounded men. When too weak to feed themselves, he would feed them, and sometimes take a spade and dig their graves.' " His labors among the miners of the West, the Mormons, and the freedmen, were also illustrated and described.

"General Clinton B. Fisk said: 'In camp and march and bivouac, in field and fight and hospital, Uncle John was a true soldier of the cross. He was a Moody and Sankey combined. His sweet voice could be heard at all times sounding the praises of Jesus. When, after hard days in the field, the officers would say, 'Uncle John, you're tired,' his cheery voice would reply in song:

'One more day's work for Jesus!

How sweet the work has been!'"

"Dr. J. D. Fulton said: 'Uncle John Vassar is to me the marvel of the age. I know of at least three services in memory of the man which are this hour being held, and tears are falling over his departure in the pine woods of Maine, among the mines and mountains of California, and the cotton fields and savannas of the South. He was a wonderful illustration of religion, pure and undefiled. It is with unfeigned gratitude to God that this statement can be made in this and any other presence, and have it stand unchallenged as an admitted truth.' The reverend doctor briefly referred to the talking gifts of the old veteran, and concluded by saying that America would yet venerate his name as England venerates the name of Bunyan.

"Rev. A. J. Gordon, D.D., wrote: 'I am sure that hundreds will concur with me in the opinion that since the days of Harlan Page the world has had few, if any, such workers for Christ as this dear man of God. His zeal and consecration were so intense, indeed, that it astonished moderate Christians, and often compelled him to hear even from the lips of Christ's professed disciples the charge, 'Thou art beside thyself.' But often as he met that reproof it never offended him. His reply was ever that of the great apostle: 'For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God; or whether we be sober, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us.' Those of us who knew him intimately know how blessedly sane he was on all high themes of divine love and holy obedience to Christ Jesus the Saviour; how rational he was when judged by the text, 'For me to live is Christ.'

"I gladly and gratefully pay this tribute to his memory, that I have never been so humbled and quickened by contact with any living man as with him.

"Farewell, dear man of God. Hundreds of Christians, while sorrowing that they shall see thy face no more for the present, will bless God, as long as they live, for the quickening and inspiration which they received from thy devoted life.'"

Rev. John W. Harding contributes this sketch:

"Multitudes who have been greatly indebted for spiritual help to this beloved disciple tenderly lament his departure, and rejoice in his glorious welcome to the nearer presence of his Lord. Soldiers who wore the blue and gray; Christian- and Sanitary-Commission men and

women; many repenting sinners and returning backsliders; others to whom he has been a son of consolation in their poverty and affliction; many wavering ones whom he has brought to decision; many pastors whom he has edified and instructed in needed points of spiritual experience and pastoral deficiency—rise up now, with swift accord, to call him blessed.

“What a good fight was his! Despised, rebuffed, persecuted, he held right on, meekly and joyfully, in his simple, earnest, faithful way, his little worn Testament in hand, his single eye fixed on Jesus, Master, Saviour of lost souls; his lips moving, even when no voice was heard, in unceasing prayer; ready to break forth in some familiar song; his spiritual intuitions, quick to discern the real soul-needs of others, and just so quick to impart in searching, yet loving, words the remedy.

“Rebuffs, coldness, insults, were nothing, save that they made him sad for others’ sake. He passed on to another house, and soon forgot the momentary sting or smart. No harshness could quench the ardor of his affection. No one had any need to ask his forgiveness. It had already beamed in joy over the returning sinner, not for his own, but for Jesus’ sake.

“What a glorious power would our Christianity put on if in every church there should be one man or woman with the spiritual energy, and motive and tact to use it that Uncle John possessed!”

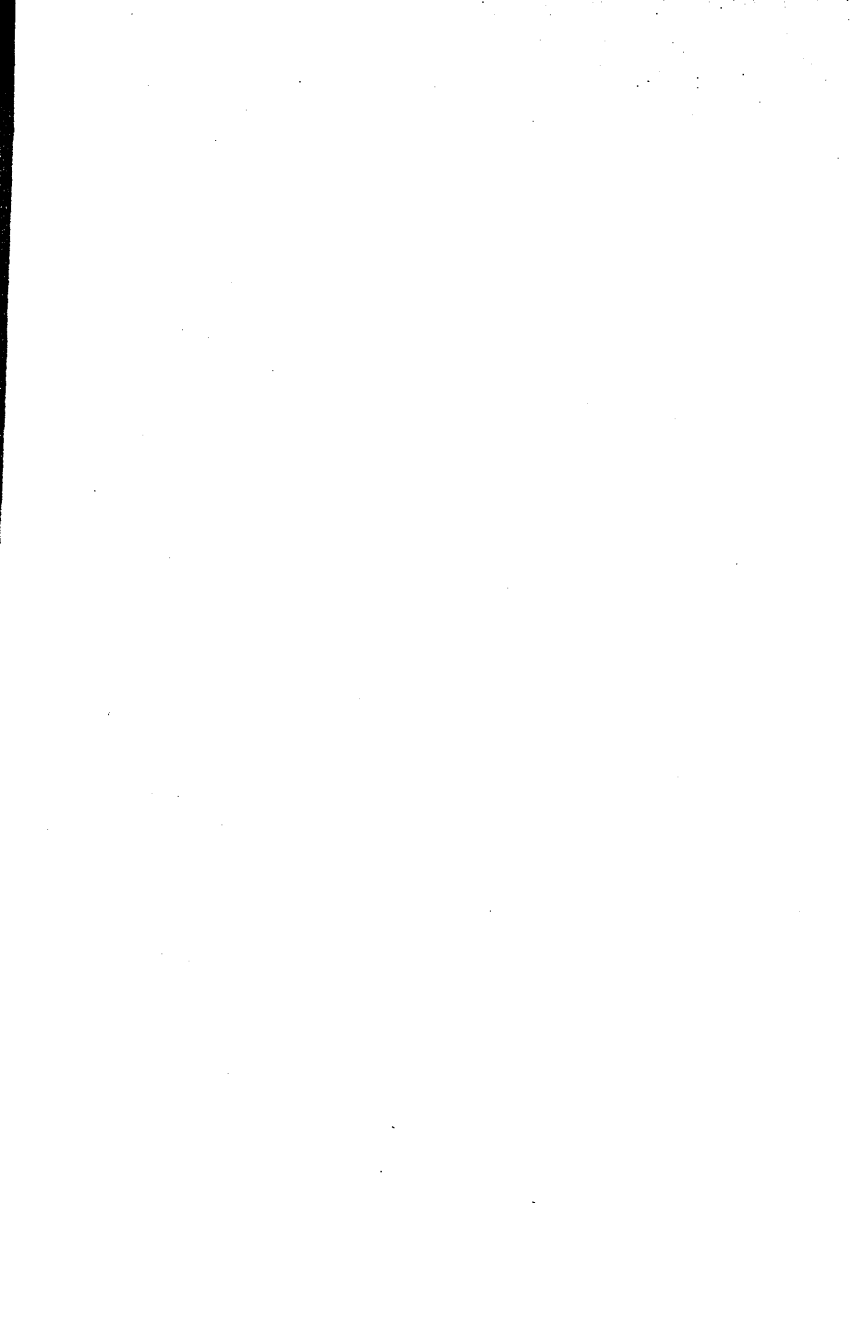
Rev. Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D., wrote:

“Uncle John Vassar was one of the remarkable characters who came to the front during the Civil War. With

its religious history his name is as indelibly linked as the names of Chaplain McCabe, or D. L. Moody, or George H. Stuart. Hundreds of soldiers, when they read the tidings of his death, will recall the beloved old man, in his brown coat and soft felt hat, who used to tramp from tent to tent with a satchel of Bibles and tracts on his back. Nor did he only carry good books in that well-known satchel. He always had a supply of envelopes and postage stamps, and a needle and thread to mend a ragged uniform, or some knick-knack which soldiers always need.

"Dear old Uncle John has reached his last bivouac. The tireless frame that scoured the prairies of Illinois, and the camps of the Union armies, and the rural regions of North Carolina and Virginia, and the everglades of Florida, is smoothed to its last quiet sleep. The soldiers and the negro freedmen will bless his memory. And many a polished pastor and profound scholar may at the last great day envy the crown and the reward of that sturdy minister in homespun—brave John Vassar."

THE END



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Vassar

Uncle John Vassar

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